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Kathy Keefer, an Army veteran and member of American Legion Post 273 in Madeira Beach, Fla., says she and her family have suffered unusual health problems that she traces back to her time at Fort McClellan, Ala.

Photo by Steven Bridges/The American Legion

### STARTING OVER

Harry Daniel, commander of Post 131 in St. John, Virgin Islands, says Hurricane Irma "destroyed everything we had – our records, our equipment, our flags." Daniel's family is donating a building for a new post home. Learn more about the region's recovery on Page 46 and online at [www.legion.org/legiontv](http://www.legion.org/legiontv). Photo by Clay Lomneth

*The American Legion Magazine, a leader among national general-interest publications, is published monthly by The American Legion for its 2 million members. These wartime veterans, working through 13,000 community-level posts, dedicate themselves to God and Country and traditional American values; strong national security; adequate and compassionate care for veterans, their widows and orphans; community service; and the wholesome development of our nation's youth.*



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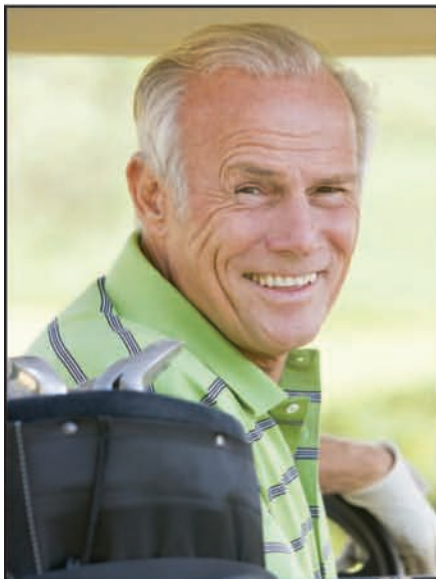
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### 'A Question of Intervention'

What a great article by Alan W. Dowd (January) explaining the history of U.S. humanitarian support around the world. This should be required reading for all high-school students and everyone in America between 18 and 40. Some would say the world is an ugly place today, but I say it would be much worse if not for the United States of America. We cannot control everything bad that happens in the world, but we sure can help when it does.

— Richard Michaelson, Jacksonville, Fla.

Alan W. Dowd's advocacy for U.S. humanitarian military intervention left out three important elements: taxpayers, the national debt and, most important, the loss of American lives. Do we want to continue saddling Americans with a ballooning national debt while spilling American blood in trying to further some lofty "humanitarian" goal that often turns out the opposite of what we intended?

— John Dellinger, Aurora, Colo.

I would have liked a little more separation in Alan W. Dowd's writing in regard to military intervention compared to humanitarian intervention, especially in reference to having Congress involved.

Yes, the president's priorities should be defense of the homeland, defense of U.S. citizens overseas and, lastly, protection, when warranted, of U.S. interests overseas. The War

Powers Act gives the president authority to intervene militarily overseas, but after 30 days he goes to Congress to keep funding the operation.

As to humanitarian operations, the U.S. Armed Forces are the only means to swiftly react to situations to help save lives and lessen suffering. If Dowd really thinks the president should get help from Congress before America flexes its muscle in these situations in a timely manner, good luck with that.

— J.H. Thompson, Ogden, Utah

### 'Tet'

If the media had covered the Battle of the Bulge the same way they did Tet (January), they'd have had Americans believing Ike was about to surrender to Alfred Jodl!

— Al Shumard, Winter Haven, Fla.

Alan W. Dowd states that our enemies have become "quite



skilled in using media and media images to target the American people.” I would contend that many of those “enemies” are and continue to be internal.

By objective measure, Tet was a serious military defeat for the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong (VC), yet the offensive was reported in such a manner as to appear a U.S. defeat. Biased reporting emphasized the destruction caused by U.S. firepower at Hue while ignoring the murders committed by the VC while it controlled the city; unfairly compared Khe Sanh to Dien Bien Phu and presented it as a doomed outpost; and portrayed the communists as exceptional fighters and the South Vietnamese as cowardly malingerers, unwilling or incapable of fighting for their country.

– Joe Spelman, Frederick, Md.

Thank you for publishing one of the best editorials on Vietnam I have ever read. I was there in 1968 during the Tet Offensive, assigned to the 1st Infantry Division, and I remember sharing the same feelings with my buddies. The political fervor in Washington left us humiliated and with low morale. It was truly out of step with the war.

– Robert J. Conine, Howell, Mich.

Alan W. Dowd makes the same mistake about Tet that so many military people do. Winning a battle or a war is hard, but it is a defined task with a beginning and an end. To win the peace is much harder, and you never can really declare victory. Winning

at war is a technical problem; winning the peace is a human-relationship problem.

America is a winner because of who we are – or at least who we try to be. We represent the values of democracy, equality, rule of law, protection of minorities, freedom of religion, compassion and honesty. To the extent we fail to live up to these values, we cannot expect to be winners when challenged.

In 1967 and 1968, the truth was that we’d won every battle but were losing both the war in Vietnam and our way at home. When a Marine comes home on leave after the battles of Tet and the taxi driver refuses to pick him up because he is not white, we are not who we claim to be. Tet exposed our own failings.

– Michael E. McGinley, Washougal, Wash.

What lost the war for us was playing it in every living room across the country every night. Mothers couldn’t take it, and it followed that politicians couldn’t take it either. Two weak presidents, more interested in advancing their political goals, combined to give Ho Chi Minh what he expected from the start: a nation not committed to war.

We all know Vietnam was a mistake. We will probably see in the near future that Iraq and Afghanistan are also mistakes. We stayed out of the Mideast forever and a day, but when Russia collapsed and the Cold War ended we stuck our nose in. If we get drawn into North Korea or Iran, you’ll see how soon we forget Iraq and Afghanistan.

– Jim Crease, Sayre, Pa.

## Single-payer health care

I found it interesting that Sen. Bernie Sanders uses the words of Abraham Lincoln in arguing for a single-payer health-care system (Big Issues, January). When you consider that roughly 1 percent of the population served and now sometimes waits months to get appointments, where would we find enough time for the 300 million-plus? There is “no savings” because people would truly abuse the single-payer system. The costs and delays would get even worse, not to mention the intrusions and regulations the government would create. No thanks. I like my doctor, my hospital and my insurance plan.

– F.R. Fritz, Phoenix

## Veterans and loan churn

The article by Tom Philpott about loan “churn” (Veterans Update, January) rightly states that veterans are constantly solicited with refinancing offers from lenders but fails to report who the offending lenders are, and seems to overlook the obvious solution to the problem.

If lenders known to abuse veterans through “churn” are barred from extending VA loans and from selling loans on the secondary market, they’ll clean up their acts. If they cannot play under the limitations set forth – including a demonstrated net benefit to the borrower, a minimum timespan between refinance offers and/or a maximum recoupment period – they’ll have little choice but to fly right.

– Kenny Holzemer, Anacortes, Wash.

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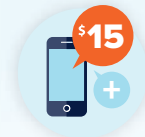
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# Expand caregiver benefits to older veterans

Veterans of the global war on terrorism know they have no greater advocate than The American Legion. Whether championing the Post-9/11 GI Bill or demanding accountability from VA, the Legion is on the side of those who served in our nation's most recent wars.

Of course, American service and sacrifice did not begin on 9/11. They have shaped every war era, going back to George Washington and the Continental Army. So wherever inequities among generations of veterans exist, corrections must be made.

Under VA's Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers, loved ones who provide lifesaving services to injured heroes are eligible for wide-ranging benefits, including monthly stipends, health-care insurance, respite care and travel expenses. But there's a catch. An eligible veteran must have incurred or aggravated the line-of-duty injury on or since 9/11. If you're caring for a veteran of World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War or the Persian Gulf War, too bad.

Fortunately, a legislative remedy exists. Under a title of the Senate's Caring for Our Veterans Act of 2017 – S. 2193 – caregiver benefits would be extended to eligible relatives of pre-9/11 veterans as well. It would be provided in phases, but eventually essential services for caregivers of all war eras would be covered.

According to former Sen. Elizabeth Dole, military caregivers provide nearly \$14 billion year in unpaid volunteer work that would otherwise be borne by society. Love is the primary motivation for these caregivers, but they still have tangible needs such as health care and income due to the time required to assist their veterans.

Dole knows the challenges that go with caring for a veteran with disabilities. Her husband, Bob, was severely wounded in World War II. During Senate testimony last year, Dole spoke of the relatives of young patients she met at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, describing the tremendous responsibilities – and in some cases fear of the future – they now face.

"Just as heartbreaking are the stories of pre-9/11 caregivers who have been supporting their loved ones for years, struggling to care for the latent effects of undiagnosed post-traumatic stress, Agent Orange, exposure to burn pits, or decades-old traumatic brain injuries that are now causing early onset dementia," Dole said. "These caregivers are just as terrified. Just as isolated. Just as important to their veterans. But when they apply for the VA caregiver stipend, they are told that the timing of their veteran's service does not qualify them for support."

Military service is inherently dangerous. Service-connected illnesses, wounds and injuries can happen at any time and in any place. As veterans age, their ailments often worsen. If caregivers are unable to assist veterans at home, many will have to rely on more expensive hospital or long-term nursing care. Not only is this deeply unfair to those who have done so much to defend our freedom, it makes no economic sense.

Throughout my year as national commander, I have made "Family First" my theme. It's time Congress does the same.

*Denise H. Rohan*



National Commander  
Denise H. Rohan

## MEMORANDA

### AMERICAN LEGION BIRTHDAY

American Legion posts will celebrate the organization's 99th birthday this month, ahead of the kickoff of the Centennial Celebration at the 100th National Convention in Minneapolis in August. Download a suggested speech and the Legion Family Dinner planning kit, share your observance on the Legiontown blog, and start a post page on the Centennial Celebration website.

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### LEGACY SCHOLARSHIP DEADLINE

The deadline for applications for the 2018 American Legion Legacy Scholarship is April 9. The Legacy Scholarship is available for children whose parents lost their lives while honorably serving on active duty on or after 9/11, as well as for children of post-9/11 veterans with a combined VA disability rating of 50 percent or higher. The renewable scholarship will award up to \$20,000 for the expense of graduate or post-graduate tuition, books, room and board, meal plans, transportation and other supplies needed to achieve a higher education.

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*"It's not about gender. It's about the veteran and being able to lead the organization."*



Photo by Lucas Carter

## RENA NESSLER

When Rena Nessler was commander of the Department of New York's 7th District, a fellow Legionnaire approached her during a membership drive. "It is so nice to see the Auxiliary here helping The American Legion," he said to Nessler, who was wearing her Legion cap at the time.

Such misunderstandings are less frequent today than when Nessler joined the Legion nearly four decades ago. "People are so proud to have a woman in command," she says. "It's not only the women, it's the men." Nessler is New York's first female department commander – and its first Native American commander.

Among her influences are National Commander Denise H. Rohan and Nessler's sister, Marlys Lemnah, Vermont's first female department commander. "Seeing them in leadership roles, and doing the work of The American Legion, the American Legion Family, gives me inspiration," she says.

Meanwhile, Nessler is leading and inspiring others in her own right. She encourages eligible veterans to join the Legion and follow their passions, whether that is volunteering with Boys State or Legion Baseball, engaging in flag advocacy or supporting military families. "The American Legion has a lot of great programs whether you're female or male," she says. "It's about helping the community. It's about helping your fellow veterans."

– Henry Howard

**BRANCH OF SERVICE** Navy (1969-1972)

**RANK** Petty officer third class

**MILITARY JOB** Yeoman


**AMERICAN LEGION POST** Winnek Post 396, Geneva, N.Y.

**YEARS IN THE LEGION** 38

### LEGION ACTIVITIES

- Department commander (2017-present)
- District commander (2015-2016)
- District vice commander (2012-2014)
- County commander (2005)
- Post adjutant (2005-present)
- Post commander (1990)
- National American Legion College graduate (2015)

**Watch an interview of Rena Nessler online:**

 [www.legion.org/magazine](http://www.legion.org/magazine)

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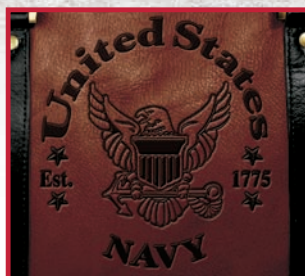


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# Passage of the federal tax overhaul



## SUPPORT

### Rep. Jim Renacci, R-Ohio

■ Renacci is a member of the House Ways & Means and Budget committees.

I had the honor to rise in support of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act. Fixing our tax code is important to all Americans, from entrepreneurs to business owners to families to everyday Americans trying to make ends meet.

While there are many stories I can tell you to describe the headaches of our tax code, I've never forgotten about a young entrepreneur starting out in the world three decades ago. This 24-year-old decided to start a business in Ohio, so he borrowed money and hired some people. As his business grew, he didn't take a paycheck and continued hiring hardworking, middle-class Americans. But he reached a point where he couldn't hire any more because of the tremendous tax bill owed to the federal government. That 24-year-old was me 30-some years ago.

Keep in mind that I happen to be a certified public accountant (CPA). Over time, I was able to figure out a way to grow my business instead of watching it die within the suffocating grip of our tax code. But it wasn't easy. And things are even harder today than they were when I was starting out. It's time for change.

This legislation will help jump-start our nation's economy and pave the way for growth. According to the Tax Foundation, the House tax bill would create more than 900,000 jobs over the next decade. This means more opportunities and take-home pay for Americans.

As a CPA and member of the tax-writing committee, I've made it my mission in Washington to fix our broken tax code. The American people deserve better than the status quo. It's time we give citizens the tax code they need to compete and prosper in the 21st century.



## OPPOSE

### Rep. John B. Larson, D-Conn.

■ Larson is a member of the House Ways & Means Committee.

The last comprehensive overhaul of the U.S. tax code happened in 1986. Under the leadership of President Ronald Reagan and House Speaker Tip O'Neill, the Ways & Means Committee conducted 30 full committee hearings and 12 subcommittee hearings, heard 450 witness testimonies and debated for 26 days of committee markup.

Contrast that to a tax-reform bill that will affect every single American but passed without a single hearing or expert witness. It

was then jammed through the House without any opportunity for amendments, because those who crafted it knew how harmful it would be for middle-class Americans. Our nation's wealthiest people and corporations will see huge tax relief, as up to 47 percent of the tax cuts go to the top 1 percent of earners.

Those tax cuts come at the expense of middle-class families whose taxes will go up due to the elimination of deductions like state and local, medical expense and student-loan interest. For example, 9 million seniors, sick Americans and disabled veterans whose out-of-pocket medical expenses exceed 10 percent of their income could take the medical expense deduction. AARP and Paralyzed Veterans of America tell us this is a firmly middle-class benefit, with 70 percent of those taking the deduction earning less than \$75,000 a year. And the House GOP tax plan eliminates the Work Opportunity Tax Credit that helps veterans get hired.

We ought to solve the problems with our tax code through a bipartisan, transparent process that achieves a balanced outcome rather than doing so at the expense of the middle class and those who have already sacrificed so much.

**THE HEART OF THE ISSUE**  
*Republicans hail the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act as overdue relief for the American middle class and a boost to the nation's economy. Democrats call it a windfall for big business and the rich.*

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# THE GIFT OF LIFE

*Benefits outweigh the risks of organ donation.*

BY LANCE FRAZER

Creata Medical Details

On average, 92 organ transplants occur per day in the United States, and more than 118,000 people are on a waiting list (another person is added every 10 minutes). And while 95 percent of American adults support organ donation, only 54 percent are actual registered donors (most through their driver's license applications).

"That the potential donor has expressed their own wishes makes it easier than a grieving family having to make a difficult, emotional decision (upon the donor's death)," says Kenneth Andreoni, director of transplantation surgery at the University of Florida.

Most living organ donors donate to a loved one – a child or a mate.

"This is the only procedure where a surgeon will go into a healthy body and do an operation the person doesn't need," Andreoni says. "Risks in transplant surgery are low but not zero, and we need to make sure they understand that."

The costs of transplant surgery are high, but in most cases a donor operation is paid for by the recipient's insurance company (including Medicare), he adds. The expenses of testing, surgery, post-op care, prescriptions and more are also charged to the recipient's insurance. However, other expenses – such as the donor's time off from work for recovery – are typically not covered.

Organizations that can provide assistance include the National Living Donor Assistance Center ([www.livingdonorassistance.org](http://www.livingdonorassistance.org)), a federally sponsored organization that works with potential living donors to help with certain expenses.

Age can be a factor, though not the deciding one, says David Klassen, chief medical officer for the United Network for Organ Sharing. "For living donors, general health is the primary concern," he says. In many cases, "some people into their 60s and 70s have proven to be excellent kidney donors."

The average adult kidney-transplant patient lives two times longer than a comparable patient on dialysis, "and it's a process of which insurance companies are very supportive," Andreoni says. "Dialysis is tremendously expensive and can go on for many, many years."

A study from the University of Pennsylvania's Perelman School of Medicine indicated that an older patient, or one who lives in an area with long waits for transplants, may have the best chance of survival by accepting a kidney from a deceased donor with diabetes. Another study discovered that "even transplantation with kidneys with the worst biopsy findings would result in several more years of life than remaining on dialysis."

Kidney donation may get the most attention, but many different organs can be donated for transplant. While Klassen says the number of donors in the United States has been rising 5 percent annually for the past several years, the demand is still not being met. "We're working on new technologies to expand the pool of potential donors, and some are even working on generation of organs in the laboratory, but we're still running behind," he says.

The bottom line is that the country needs more organ donors.

According to Kim Olthoff, chief of the Division of Transplant Surgery at the University of Pennsylvania, "if more people designate 'donation' on their driver's licenses, or if more people talk about the decision to be an organ donor with their families and loved ones, or if more people decide to selflessly participate in living donation, we would be able to save more lives through transplantation."

*Lance Frazer is a California-based freelance writer specializing in health and medicine, science, nature and the environment.*



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# Good bones

Did you know that half of women, and 25 percent of men, will break at least one bone after age 50? These midlife broken bones are often the result of osteoporosis. But this condition is not an inevitable byproduct of aging, as was once thought.

Writing in *Healthy Living Made Simple*, Andrea Singer, clinical director for the National Osteoporosis Foundation and a national expert on bone-loss issues, explains that “we can hold onto strong bones with the right combination of nutrition, exercise, healthy habits, fall prevention and medication when needed.” She calls this “a whole-person bone-health action plan.”

The whole-person approach includes a calcium-rich diet (plus vitamin D supplements, if needed), regular exercise, fall-proofing your home, avoiding too much alcohol and smoking cessation. Medication may also be needed if you have experienced breaks or bone loss.

Singer urges seniors to watch for red flags, like a broken wrist caused by a fall. “Normal bone doesn’t break when you fall at standing height,” she writes. “A break caused by a fall from a standing height, no matter how ‘hard’ the surface or how ‘bad’ the fall, is considered low-trauma and is almost always due to weak, brittle bones: osteoporosis.”

If something like that happens, ask your health-care provider about a bone-density test, Singer says. “Together, you can assess your risk for more fractures and make decisions about the best ways to protect your bones in the years ahead.”



Media Bakery

Living Well is designed to provide general information. It is not intended to be, nor is it, medical advice. Readers should consult their physicians when they have health problems.



Photo courtesy Pets for Seniors

## Seniors and pets

BY STEPHANIE BOUCHARD

After caring for his aging mother in his home for seven years, Army veteran Jim Hutcheson, 76, of West Peoria, Ill., felt the loss of companionship when she moved into an assisted living facility. So he adopted an 8-pound middle-aged Chihuahua he named Peanut.

“He’s got big eyes and long ears, and he just loves to snuggle,” Hutcheson says. “He usually lies on an afghan in the chair next to me, but then he’ll raise up, and he’ll look at me like, ‘Can I come over and sit with you?’ All I have to do is kind of nod and he jumps out of his chair and onto my lap.”

Research evidence varies that having a pet is good for seniors, but the prevailing wisdom is that animal companions benefit people of all ages.

Some studies suggest that having pets lowers cortisol, the “stress” hormone, and increases levels of serotonin, the “feel good” hormone. That in turn lowers one’s heart rate, blood pressure and stress levels, and diminishes depression and feelings of loneliness.

Pet owners also may reap the benefits of additional exercise and social interaction. For example, dog owners can take regular walks, visiting with other people along the way. Those with felines can toss balls to their cats.

Other studies indicate that having pets does not slow down age-related declines like reduced mobility, and the loss or illness of a well-loved pet can cause or deepen depression and loneliness and increase stress. Costs of veterinary care can also be a burden to those with limited incomes.

For Hutcheson and thousands of others, though, no evidence is needed to tell them what they know from their own experience: the benefits of having pets can’t be quantified. “It’s just nice to have somebody to come home to,” he says.

While Hutcheson recommends welcoming a pet into your life, he and animal experts say that adopting a pet shouldn’t be taken lightly.

The National Council for Aging Care suggests that seniors consider their income, activity levels and health to determine what kind of pet is best. Make a pros-and-cons list. And ease your mind with a Plan B for what happens if you can’t care for your beloved pet in the short or long term. Visit [www.aginginplace.org/seniors-and-pets](http://www.aginginplace.org/seniors-and-pets) for more advice about adopting a pet.

Stephanie Bouchard is a freelance writer living in Maine. Visit her website at [stephaniebouchard.net](http://stephaniebouchard.net).

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# 5 LOW-KEY SPRING BREAK DESTINATIONS

Gulf Shores, Alabama

Photo courtesy Gulf Shores and Beach Tourism

*Try these less-crowded beaches.*

BY LYN METTLER

Here are five U.S. beaches that offer all the fun in the sun you'd find at Myrtle Beach, Panama City or Daytona, but still leave you plenty of room to find your own perfect patch of sand.

**MARCO ISLAND** Just south of Naples, Fla., and accessible from the airport in Fort Myers, Marco Island is a peaceful getaway as far south as you can go on Florida's Gulf side before reaching the Everglades. This quiet community offers vacation rentals and resorts with restaurants, shopping, a spa, pools and a wide swath of beach where you can kayak, jet ski the Everglades and paddleboard. Families may also want to try the Dolphin Explorer eco tour to help name and catalog new dolphins.

**GULF SHORES** A hidden gem, Gulf Shores, Ala., has more than 30 miles of white sand beaches along turquoise-blue seas. Accommodations are mostly rentable condominiums, though there are several hotels and smaller boutique properties. History buffs can follow a 90-mile Civil War Trail with more than a dozen sites where action occurred during the Battle of Mobile Bay and the Overland Campaign. There's also a coastal trail that follows the path of migratory birds.

**ST. SIMONS AND JEKYLL ISLANDS** St. Simons and Jekyll are part of the Golden Isles off Georgia's southern coast. St. Simons is the largest, with a charming village, an 1872 lighthouse and Christ Church, which has hosted worshipers since 1736. Jekyll Island was the private retreat of late 19th-century elite, including the Rockefellers and

Carnegies; stay at the historic Jekyll Island Club, a grand old hotel that is now a historic landmark, or the more affordable Holiday Inn with a quarter-mile of beachfront.

## CORONADO ISLAND AND PACIFIC BEACH

If a SoCal getaway sounds appealing, head to San Diego, which has a variety of beaches – including Coronado Island, home to the iconic Hotel del Coronado, and Pacific Beach, a more relaxed getaway just north of the city. On Coronado, bike through winding streets from the beach to San Diego Bay with great views of the city. At Pacific Beach, pick from a range of beachside hotels or rent a cottage on the beach's pier. While the waters are chillier on the West Coast, don a wetsuit and try surfing or even boogie boarding the large waves, or watch an eclectic crowd skateboarding and rollerblading up and down the boardwalk.

## ISLE OF PALMS AND SULLIVAN'S ISLAND

Just outside Charleston, S.C., are several beaches that don't see a large influx of spring-break tourism. Across the Cooper River are the town of Mount Pleasant and two barrier islands, Isle of Palms and Sullivan's Island. Sullivan's Island is the quieter of the two, with only homes and condos available for rent. Isle of Palms is a bit busier with the Wild Dunes Resort, which has restaurants, two Tom Fazio-designed public golf courses, bike rentals, tennis courts and a spa in a beach setting.

*Lyn Mettler is a freelance travel writer who blogs at [GotoTravelGal.com](http://GotoTravelGal.com).*



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# VA to pay ‘partial’ non-VA emergency claims

BY TOM PHILPOTT

Months after conceding defeat in the *Staab* federal court decision, the Department of Veterans Affairs published a regulation and began to pay backlogged claims for episodes of private-sector emergency care in which a veteran’s other health insurance paid only part of resulting costs.

The rule expands eligibility for reimbursement of non-VA emergency treatment to any veteran who receives only partial payment for such care from a health-plan contract. It also establishes a reimbursement methodology for payments, which are to cover “reasonable” emergency costs for VA-enrolled veterans – including hospital charges, professional fees and emergency transportation such as ambulances.

Some of the claims to be reimbursed were filed as far as back as 2010 but kept alive on appeal. Individual reimbursements on some claims could total tens of thousands of dollars – for example, if emergency care required heart surgery or other complex procedures that a veteran’s other health insurance covered poorly.

VA stopped deciding claims for partially paid non-VA emergency care on April 8, 2016, the day a three-judge panel on the U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims ruled unanimously that VA wrongly ignored the “plain language” of a statute enacted in 2009 to reimburse veterans the portion of private-sector emergency care expenses not covered by any other plan. Instead, VA continued to reject such claims for years. It even ignored the 2009 law while revising a regulation on non-VA emergency care in 2012.

By the end of September, VA had a backlog of *Staab*-related claims of 749,000 from 2016 and 2017 alone, and expects 635,000 more in fiscal 2018, for a total of 1,384,000 claimants through September.

After the appeals court defeat, VA spent over a year pondering whether to appeal to a higher appellate court. Last June, VA Secretary David Shulkin dismissed that idea. VA would begin paying the claims when it had rules written to implement the decision and processes in place to calculate and make payments.

Not all veterans enrolled in VA health care who needed non-VA emergency care costs will be pleased. The Jan. 9 rule said *Staab* does not benefit veterans whose claims for reimbursement were made final before the 2016 court decision. When a judicial decision invalidates a VA regulation or VA interpretation of law it “cannot affect prior final VA decisions,” VA officials said, citing the precedent set from two earlier federal court decisions.

Air Force veteran Richard W. Staab filed his lawsuit against VA because he faced \$48,000 in unpaid hospital bills after emergency heart surgery in December 2010. VA officials told Staab the department was responsible for unpaid non-VA emergency costs only if the veteran had no other health insurance.

Because Staab was eligible for Medicare Part A, which paid a portion of his emergency care, VA rejected his claim to cover what Medicare did not.

After a few lower-court victories, Staab also won on appeal. The court agreed with his argument that VA kept its convoluted interpretation of payment obligations for non-VA emergency care even after Congress clarified the law so VA would be responsible for any outside emergency care costs left unpaid.

While deciding whether to appeal to a higher appellate court, VA warned that if *Staab* stood it would have to pay almost \$2 billion on pending claims and more than \$10 billion on additional emergency care costs over the next decade.

With the Jan. 9 rule, however, VA freshened its cost estimates and came in sharply lower than it earlier argued to the courts. VA developed a low, medium and high cost estimate, by year. The highest estimate has *Staab*-related claims costing VA \$100 million in fiscal 2018 and \$297 million over five years. VA officials also expect to cover the added costs within current budgets, with no need for a special appropriation from Congress.

*Tom Philpott has been covering military personnel and veterans issues for more than 40 years.*



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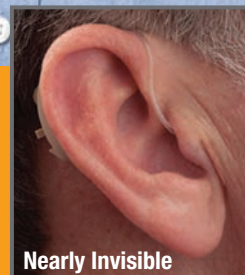
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*Serving at one of the  
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consequences for veterans  
and their families –  
for generations.*

*Kathy Keefer and her family have suffered a long list of unusual health problems consistent with exposure to toxic chemicals since she served at Fort McClellan, Ala., adjacent to one of the nation's most contaminated sites.*

Steven Bridges/The American Legion

# The Long Shadow of Fort McClellan

BY KEN OLSEN

**K**athy Keefer had no idea that Fort McClellan was adjacent to one of the nation's most contaminated communities when she returned for her second Army stint in 1987 while pregnant with her eldest daughter. She didn't know that decades of polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB) pollution from the nearby Monsanto plant had permeated the tree bark in Anniston, Ala., and turned domestic pigs into hazardous waste. Or that the drinking water had been tainted by heavy metals, solvents and other hazardous waste from the Anniston Army Depot, Fort McClellan and other industrial sources.

She's thought a lot about it in retrospect, given the strange health problems visited upon herself, her husband – also a Fort McClellan veteran – and her children, problems entirely at odds with their family medical histories.

"If I had known that Fort McClellan was a potential hazard for my unborn child, I would have found a way to stay off base and petitioned not to have gone at all," Keefer says.

That sentiment is shared by thousands of veterans who suspect that a litany of cancers, autoimmune disorders and other diseases are a result of toxic chemicals they were exposed to while stationed at the base in northeastern Alabama.

"Fort McClellan is a powder keg of what was known, suspected and found there," says Joan Zakrocki, who earned her bachelor's degree in public health after leaving the Army and now researches the former base's environmental problems as an advocate for Fort McClellan veterans and families. "Our time at Fort McClellan was the single most important factor contributing to our health."

Not only does Fort McClellan's toxic résumé rival Camp Lejeune, N.C., where trichloroethylene (TCE) and other pollutants eventually forced VA to provide exposure-related health care to Marines, formerly serving Marines and families. But the

combination of toxic chemicals from Monsanto, Fort McClellan and the Anniston Army Depot makes it the most contaminated place in the United States, says David Carpenter, director of the Institute for Health and the Environment at the State University of New York at Albany in Rensselaer.

"In terms of documented contaminants, the levels are absolutely outrageous," Carpenter says. And there's plenty of anecdotal evidence that Fort McClellan veterans suffered as a result. "There's too much smoke for there not to be a cause common to those people."

The issue is particularly acute for female Army veterans, whose future children may have been affected by that exposure, Carpenter says. Add to that the fact that Fort McClellan was once the primary basic training base for women who joined the Army.

"That's what makes Fort McClellan a little different," says Diane Zumatto, who suspects her family's health problems are tied to her time in Anniston. "I think more women were exposed at Fort McClellan than other military bases."

Rather than getting help from the nation they served, Fort McClellan veterans say they are getting the brushoff, and that VA dismisses the suggestion that servicemembers may suffer health consequences as a result of toxic exposure at the base. "Veterans who mention Fort McClellan to VA providers," Zakrocki says, "are often rebuked."

**TOXIC LEGACY** Fort McClellan was established next to Anniston, a city known for its iron smelters, in July 1917. Named for Civil War Gen. George B. McClellan, the base has had a variety of missions. It trained approximately 500,000 soldiers and was a prisoner of war camp during World War II. The Chemical Corps was activated there in 1951. The Army's Chemical/Biological/Radiological Agency followed in 1962 and the U.S. Army Chemical School in 1979.





*Safety officer Jerry Rice checks the eyes of Marine Cpl. Marty Williams at Fort McClellan, Ala., on Aug. 30, 1990. From the 1920s through the base's closure in 1999, hundreds of thousands of servicemembers were exposed to toxins through chemical weapons training, or indirectly through air, soil and water contamination. Photo courtesy The Anniston Star*

Women's Army Corps (WAC) basic training started at Fort McClellan in 1952. Approximately 350,000 female recruits trained there before the WAC was disbanded in the late 1970s. Fort McClellan also served as the primary military-police training base for the Army, Navy and Marines, Zakrocki says. Over the years, it had an average population of 10,000 military personnel and 1,500 civilian employees, according to Army websites.

The fort was shuttered at the recommendation of the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) Commission in 1999. A portion of the acreage was turned over to the city of Anniston for redevelopment. Some of it became a national wildlife refuge. Some is used by the Alabama National Guard and the Department of Homeland Security.

Fort McClellan's toxic legacy is virtually unknown, which is surprising considering its own chemical and biological weapons training programs, the chemical weapons stockpile at the Anniston Army Depot, and its proximity to the Monsanto plant that manufactured PCBs in Anniston from 1929 to the 1970s.

There are 209 PCBs. They cause cancer, suppress the immune system,

disrupt the endocrine system – the thyroid gland, for example – and elevate the risks of high blood pressure and type II diabetes, Carpenter says. “The thing that most people don't realize is how many different organ systems can be disrupted by exposure to a chemical.”

Monsanto's PCB pollution attracted national media attention, including a “60 Minutes” segment

## AMERICAN LEGION RESOLUTION 118

Passed at the 98th National Convention in 2016, Resolution 118 urges DoD to fully disclose all wartime and non-wartime locations to VA where hazardous environmental exposures exist and U.S. servicemembers were exposed “through testing, transportation, storage, disposal, and environmental contamination,” including Fort McClellan, Ala., Fort Drum, N.Y., Fort Dugway, Utah, and others.

Resolution 118 calls for:

- Legislation requiring VA to establish a national center for research on the diagnosis and treatment of health conditions of descendants of individuals exposed to toxic substances during service.
- Providing “thorough and appropriate examinations and treatment” to veterans reporting to VA medical care facilities claiming exposure to environmental hazards, and compassion from VA physicians in responding to the medical needs of these veterans.
- Liberalization of rules relating to the evaluation of studies involving exposure to any environmental hazard, “and that all necessary action be taken by the federal government ... to ensure that veterans are properly compensated for diseases and other disabilities scientifically associated with a particular exposure.”

Read the full resolution online:

 [www.legion.org/resolutions](http://www.legion.org/resolutions)

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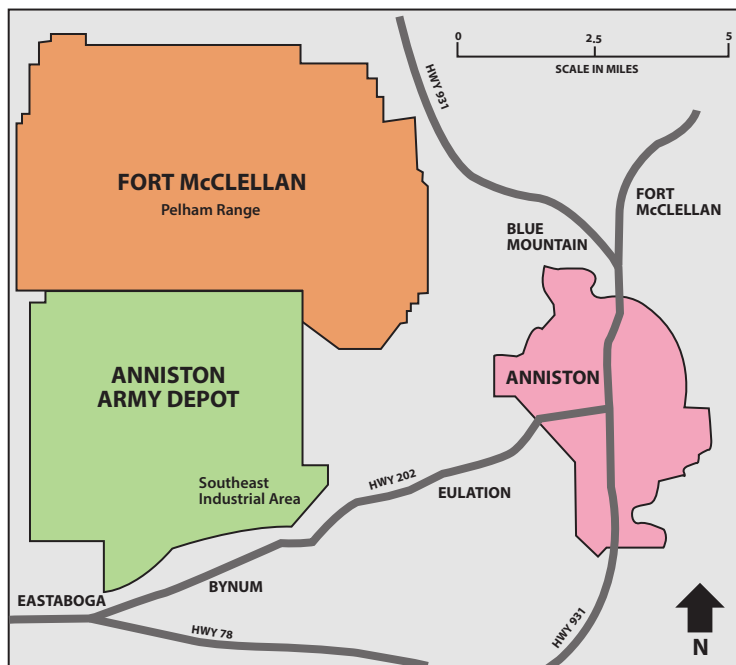
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## Anniston Army Depot and surrounding area



*In 2003, Monsanto settled a class-action lawsuit with residents of Anniston, Ala., but veterans who trained and lived at Fort McClellan were not included in the suit. At present, VA does not recognize Fort McClellan as the cause of toxic exposure health issues, claiming no evidence of widespread contamination problems.*

Source: Environmental Protection Agency, September 1991

in 2002. The company settled a lawsuit with Anniston residents for \$700 million in 2003, a sum that reflects the extent of the contamination. “There were PCBs found in the tree bark up to three miles away – about the distance the Monsanto plant is from Fort McClellan,” Carpenter says. Pigs raised by Anniston residents – often the poorer members of the community – were so contaminated they had to be carted off to hazardous-waste landfills.

No veterans were included in the litigation, likely because the attorneys who sued Monsanto focused on civilians who lived in neighborhoods closest to the manufacturing plant and had the highest PCB levels in their blood, says Carpenter, who was an expert witness in the case.

That exclusion is mind-boggling to Fort McClellan veterans. “I don’t know how Anniston was exposed and we weren’t,” Keefer says. “Were we not drinking the same water? Were we not living in the same town? Were we not breathing the same air?”

**FIRST SYMPTOMS** Keefer’s health problems surfaced soon after she was recalled to active duty as an MP during the run-up to the first Gulf War. Blood started leaking out of her right breast while she was taking a shower at Foot Hood. An Army doctor recommended immediate surgery. Keefer refused and, at her mother’s urging, was

examined at a top civilian cancer center in Houston after she left the Army in late 1991. The medical team couldn’t find a cause for the bleeding, but Keefer continues to experience strange discharges from her right breast.

Other medical problems have since piled on: benign cervical tumors and a benign lump in her left breast that grew to the size of a lemon in six months. Abdominal pain, insomnia, fatigue and Hashimoto’s disease – an autoimmune disorder that causes the body to attack the thyroid gland. Keefer suffers the sudden onset of a burning sensation on her left leg that comes and goes without explanation. And she deals with involuntary muscle twitching and gastrointestinal problems. “I had so many physical problems – I had no idea why – that I kind of thought I was a huge hypochondriac.”

No one in Keefer’s family had previously experienced any of these health issues. But one of her daughters now has the same gastrointestinal problems. Another daughter – the one she was carrying during her second stint at Fort McClellan – suffers from periodic bouts of a ringworm-like rash, as does her husband.

“It all goes back to Fort McClellan,” says Keefer, a member of American Legion Post 273 in Madeira Beach, Fla. “It has to be the crap we were exposed to.”

Carpenter confirms that the health

A close-up of the reverse side of a 2018 American Liberty Dollar coin. The coin features the Statue of Liberty, the words 'LIBERTY', 'IN GOD WE TRUST', and the year '2018'.



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consequences of toxic exposure could affect the children of Fort McClellan veterans. “Something your grandmother was exposed to can affect your grandchildren,” he says. “The health effects are going to continue for years, if not generations. That’s why we need to study the women who were stationed at Fort McClellan. Do their daughters have profiles of diseases that are elevated?”

That prospect weighs on Zumatto. Two of her children have had seizures. Her eldest son has Crohn’s disease and her eldest daughter has hip dysplasia. Her sister, also a Fort McClellan veteran, has suffered seizures and two bouts of cancer. None of these health problems had previously occurred in her family.

**IN ACTION** Keefer filed a VA claim four years ago. It was rejected. Appealing that decision is a waste of time until the department officially recognizes how serving at Fort McClellan came with exposure-related problems, she says.

VA is far from convinced.

“VA has reviewed several documents on the environmental investigations conducted at Fort McClellan and has found no evidence of widespread contamination issues,” VA said in an email responding to questions from *The American Legion Magazine*. That applies to PCBs as well, even with Fort McClellan’s close proximity to the now-defunct Monsanto plant. VA’s Fort McClellan webpage cites a report from the federal Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) that says people who lived outside the neighborhoods near Monsanto didn’t face a higher risk of cancer or other health problems.

“That is an outrageous response that is totally inconsistent with the evidence,” Carpenter says. “ATSDR has a very bad track record of minimizing risks, and they seem not to even know the relevant literature.”

Fort McClellan veterans have long lobbied for a health registry that would help establish whether they’ve experienced abnormal health problems that can be tied to toxic exposure and potentially pave the way for VA health care for those diseases. Carpenter supports that idea.

“It’s impossible, at this stage of the game, to go back and determine all of the things people were exposed to because the base has been closed so many years,” Carpenter says. “We know they were exposed to organic solvents, incinerator emission from the Anniston Army Depot, TCE and some level of PCBs wafting over from Monsanto.”

A health registry is the logical next step. “It’s

## RESOURCES

■ **Operation Stand Together** Founded by Fort McClellan veteran Vincent Diem and his wife, Carrie, in 2016, Operation Stand Together is an advocacy and education organization for veterans dealing with toxic exposure related to their military service. Diem was stationed at Fort McClellan twice and is dealing with numerous resulting health issues. He is chaplain of Shenandoah American Legion Post 77 in Strasburg, Va. The organization also has a Facebook group; search for “Operation Stand Together.” Other Facebook groups include **Fort McClellan Toxic Exposure Right to Know** and **Fort McClellan Toxic Exposure for Veterans**.

■ **VA** The VA website has a page about potential toxic exposure at Fort McClellan. It lists several resources but makes it clear that VA does not believe Fort McClellan caused any contamination-related health issues.

 [www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/fort-mcclellan](http://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/fort-mcclellan)

not trivial,” Carpenter says. “It’s not cheap. But it’s not at all impossible.”

VA, however, opposes a registry, again citing what it believes is a lack of evidence of consequential environmental hazards at the Anniston base. Efforts in Congress to mandate such measures have failed. U.S. Rep. Paul Tonko, D-N.Y., has introduced legislation to establish a health registry four times since 2010, only to have the bills die in the House. He reintroduced his bill in September with bipartisan support from seven co-sponsors, and the measure has been referred to the Veterans’ Affairs Subcommittee on Health. Tonko is optimistic his effort ultimately will succeed as calls for the measure grow from affected veterans around the country.

“In this case, you have a group of veterans who appear to be showing a pattern of severe and otherwise unexplained health consequences, and a denial by the system to acknowledge and support their needs,” Tonko says. “That’s wrong. Creating a health registry is a first step in establishing the link between service at Fort McClellan and serious adverse and deteriorating health.”

Time is of the essence.

“To be clear, these veterans have been left to suffer for far too long already,” Tonko says. “There’s a right way to do this, and we need to get this started now.” 🌿

*Ken Olsen is a frequent contributor to The American Legion Magazine.*

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# RIDE TO THE RESCUE

*A joint U.S. and South Vietnamese push broke the siege at Khe Sanh.*

BY JOHN PRADOS

## JANUARY 1968. BEFORE TET.

Gen. William C. Westmoreland, his Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV), and every level of the U.S. and South Vietnamese hierarchies were obsessed with an outpost – a combat base, really – up near the demilitarized zone (DMZ) that separated South Vietnam from North Vietnam. There, a handful of Marine rifle battalions, some pacification specialists of a combined action company, Green Berets leading a force of Montagnards, and operators of the shadowy MACV Special Operations Group were holding onto a set of hill positions ringed by the North Vietnamese army.

On Jan. 21, the enemy opened a sustained artillery barrage that gravely damaged the combat base, destroying its main ammunition dump. Under that cover North Vietnamese troops advanced against Hill 861, one of the strongpoints, and the village of Khe Sanh. They failed in the hills but captured the village. From that day on, the combat base struggled under siege, constantly shelled and repeatedly threatened with new ground attacks. Marines now did the “Khe Sanh shuffle,” darting from bunker to trench to evade the North Vietnamese gunners.

The Americans were obliged to supply Khe Sanh by air. Only one road connected the combat base to MACV positions in the lowlands, and the enemy had cut that months earlier. Now the North Vietnamese closed in to besiege Khe Sanh. MACV’s inability to utilize Route 9, the road that paralleled the DMZ, weighed ever heavier with every airplane or helicopter damaged or destroyed on the dangerous resupply missions. Within days, Westmoreland would be diverted to putting out the fires of the Tet Offensive, but he laid the groundwork for an overland rescue operation beforehand.

On Jan. 25, the MACV chief created a forward headquarters in the military region covering Khe Sanh and put his deputy, Lt. Gen. Creighton W. Abrams, in charge of it. Westmoreland also called in

*U.S. soldiers jump from a helicopter during Operation Pegasus, an overland relief expedition that eventually broke through to Marines trapped at Khe Sanh.*

Photo by Larry Burrows/Time Magazine/The LIFE Picture Collection/Getty Images



Maj. Gen. John J. Tolson, leading the Cav, the vaunted 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile), then in the process of deploying to that same region. “Westy” asked Tolson to begin planning a relief expedition. This contingency became a fixture in MACV thinking; once Tet had begun and Westmoreland and Washington traded cables on reinforcing South Vietnam, he used Khe Sanh’s relief as one of his justifications for more troops.

With Tet, Tolson’s Cav became embroiled in the furious fighting around Hue. Marines and South Vietnamese troops famously fought within the city, but the Cav operated against North Vietnamese supply lines to the west.

As extra reinforcements arrived, 1st Cavalry units were shifted north to the Quang Tri-Dong Ha area, where Route 9 originates at the latter town. The division’s 3rd Brigade, which had borne the brunt of the fight outside Hue, rested and took over base security duties.

On March 2, the generals gathered at Da Nang for a command conference. Hashing out strategy were Abrams, Tolson, Robert Cushman (the Marine three-star leading III Marine Amphibious Force, or III MAF, the regional headquarters), and Rathvon M. Tompkins, the Marine two-star who led the 3rd Marine Division. Tompkins recalled Abrams speculating on the Cav taking over security in the coastal zone and the 3rd Marine Division attacking west to Khe Sanh. Tompkins got to his feet and declared this the finest idea he had ever heard, and he claims Tolson supported it, having “no more desire to go to Khe Sanh than a cat does (to have) hip pockets.”

That doesn’t square with Tolson’s account of 1st Cavalry Division planning or Westmoreland’s previous orders. The brass at this meeting listened as Cav staff detailed an offensive scheme. It became known as Operation Pegasus, after the winged horse of mythology. It did have Cav units protecting the coastal area, but Tolson’s 3rd Brigade became key to the operation, and Abrams in fact gave the Cav honcho operational control of the entire offensive. Westmoreland joined them March 10, when he approved the plans. He stipulated that the South Vietnamese army (ARVN) needed to have a role in the operation as well.

As preparations continued, Khe Sanh seemed more and more threatened. A satellite Special Forces camp at Lang Vei was overrun Feb. 7. The next night brought an assault at a close-in position of the base defenses. A Marine C-130 transport, destroyed on the airstrip Feb. 10, led to a halt of landings beginning two days later. The high point

of artillery bombardments of the combat base came Feb. 23, when 1,300 rounds slammed it. On the last night of February, just before the Pegasus planners convened, Khe Sanh’s artillery and air support broke up a North Vietnamese assault force that might have been as big as a regiment.

The combat base definitely looked to be in trouble. But Pegasus could not simply be launched out of the blue. To sustain an overland offensive, Route 9 had to be restored and improved out to the Rockpile, a Marine position in the foothills to the east. Bridges needed to be strengthened and more construction material stockpiled for the road out to Khe Sanh. The Cav needed a well-provisioned landing zone as a springboard for its 3rd Brigade, which would lead the charge. Ca Lu, a hilltop village at a bend of Route 9, was selected for the launch point. It would be called Landing Zone (LZ) Stud. Marine Engineer Battalion 11 and Navy Seabees (Naval Mobile Construction Battalion 5) did the hard work on preparations. The start of Pegasus, originally timed for March 13, was pushed back to April 1. On March 26, operating from LZ Stud, the Cav’s “Headhunter” scouts – Lt. Col. Richard W. Diller’s 1st Squadron, 9th Cavalry – began their reconnaissance flights toward Khe Sanh. The Headhunters prepped new LZs for combat assaults by finding suitable clearings and calling in aircraft to expand them using huge “Daisy Cutter” bombs.

As a final touch on March 30, a Marine rifle battalion, a Cav squadron and a pair of ARVN infantry battalions began a diversionary attack on the coastal plain, from Gio Linh toward the DMZ. The North Vietnamese do not appear to have been fooled. The last actual attack at Khe Sanh took place the day before, and U.S. intelligence reporting already indicated the enemy’s withdrawal from the vicinity of the combat base.

Pegasus jumped off at 7 a.m. April 1. It was the biggest III MAF offensive of the war, with 29,000 troops – 14 battalions with 300 choppers and 148 artillery pieces. Tolson had arrived at LZ Stud the previous day. The Cav was noted for its dynamic operational techniques, with an almost instant ability to redirect forces and firepower in response to new discoveries and changing conditions. Indeed, Capt. Joseph W. Kinzer – senior adviser to the ARVN 3rd Airborne Task Force, the participating South Vietnamese brigade – felt he learned more in a week interacting with the Cav than he had in the preceding six months. Despite that dynamism, Pegasus began with an old-fashioned ground advance conducted in the

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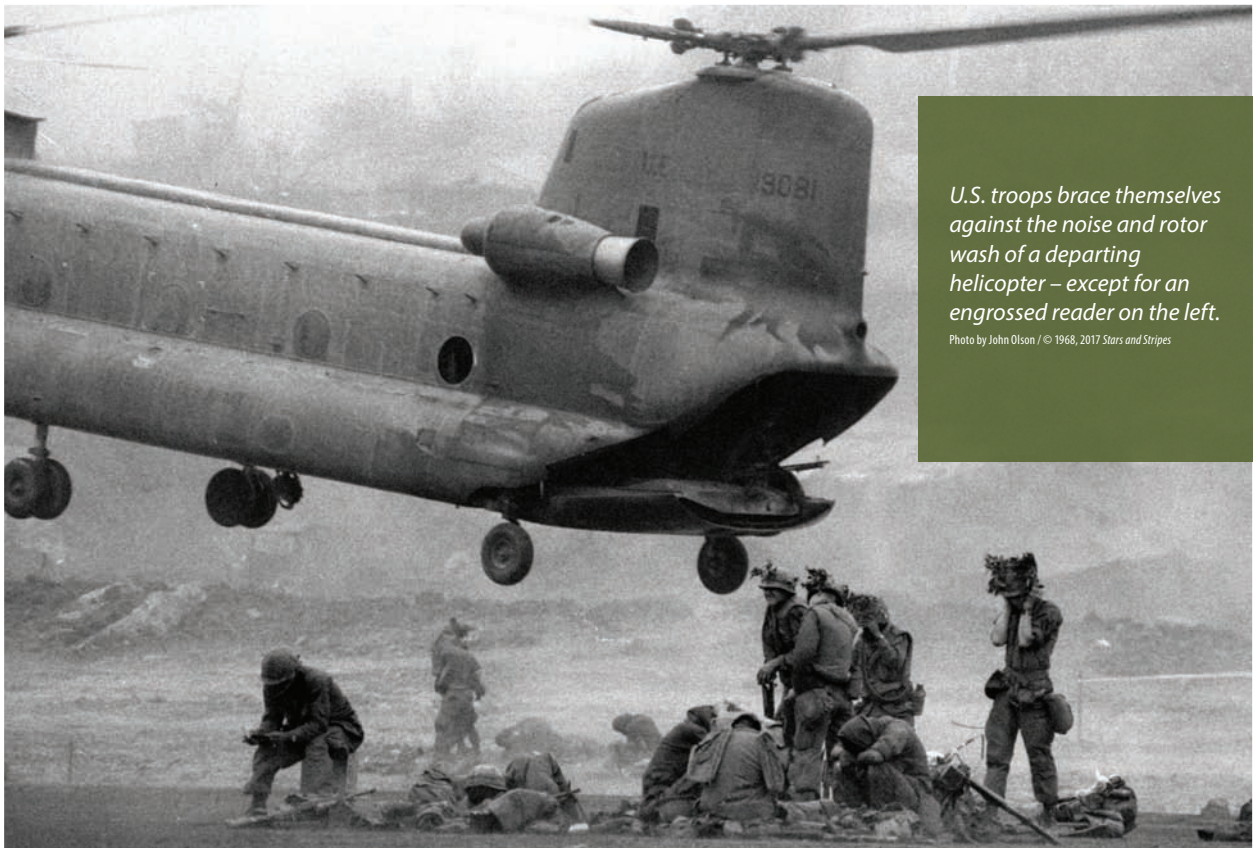
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*U.S. troops brace themselves against the noise and rotor wash of a departing helicopter – except for an engrossed reader on the left.*

Photo by John Olson / © 1968, 2017 Stars and Stripes

traditional manner: the weather had closed in and the choppers could not fly.

Col. Stanley S. Hughes with his 1st Marine Infantry Regiment made up the overland component of the attack. Hughes arrayed the 2nd Battalion, 1st Marines on the north side of Route 9, and the 2nd Battalion, 3rd Marines south of the road. The 11th Engineers followed, lifting mines and restoring the thoroughfare. The Marines crossed the line of departure precisely on time.

“It was jungle, the worst kind you can find,” observes Wayne T. Haaland, a platoon commander with Hotel Company, 2/1. “It was almost impossible to walk from objective to objective. The terrain was so rough and the growth, the underbrush, so thick that we had to use helicopter(s).” Signs of enemy presence were numerous, but few were encountered.

The Cav got started when the weather cleared the afternoon of the first day. But “cleared” is a relative term. Only occasionally were airmobile ops possible before afternoon. Equally problematic, “good” weather came to be any time when the cloud ceiling rose to 500 feet or more. At that altitude a North Vietnamese gunner could see a chopper at a distance of a mile and a half or so.

Col. Hubert S. Campbell, leading the 3rd Brigade, catapulted his 2nd Battalion, 7th Cavalry into LZ Mike, forward of where the Marines were. Lt. Joseph E. Abodeely, leading the 2nd Platoon of

D Company, recalls thick jungle and mountainous terrain. He hurt his arm jumping from the chopper. It was typical of Cav tactics that the LZ was chosen at the very last moment, practically with the choppers in motion. Abodeely remembers they air-assaulted the top of a mountain, circled by a river on three sides. That made for little enemy threat and a good night’s sleep, but there was little to do except lift out to a new LZ the next day. Abodeely’s platoon captured a 12.7mm anti-aircraft gun there.

Tolson sought to accelerate Pegasus by committing Col. Joseph C. McDonough’s 2nd Brigade earlier than planned. Most choppered into an LZ not far from Khe Sanh. Soon they were attacking the feature known as the Old French Fort. Lt. Col. Robert Runkle, leading 1st Battalion, 5th Cavalry against the French fort, was killed, becoming the most senior officer casualty of Pegasus. An estimated enemy battalion held on to the position for the next two days, and the Cav fed in an additional formation – 2nd Battalion, 5th Cavalry – to overwhelm the defenses. Tolson also had the Marine garrison get into the fight, sallying to the south to take Hill 471, which offered a panoramic view of Khe Sanh combat base. The unit that accomplished that feat was the storied “Walking Dead,” 1st Battalion, 9th Marines. Once in place, they had to beat off a battalion-size North Vietnamese counterattack.



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*Marine Lance Cpl. Eddie Windham of the 11th Engineer Battalion prepares to destroy enemy anti-tank mines and artillery shells found along Route 9 during Operation Pegasus.* USMC History Division

By then, April 4, Lt. Col. Roscoe Robinson's 2/7 Cavalry were at LZ Thor and facing enemy mortars and artillery. Ten or 11 men in Abodeely's platoon alone got minor shrapnel wounds. The platoon encountered a couple of dead GIs as they pulled back into the perimeter. A medevac chopper was shot down. When North Vietnamese artillery shells proved to be duds, the troopers worried these might be chemical or nerve agents instead. But the North Vietnamese did not employ such weapons in this war. GIs got another scare when a rumor swept the battalion that they were going to be ordered to walk into Khe Sanh. That proved true, and the worst firefight yet happened when 2/7 tried to make its way down Route 9. Robinson's two lead companies recoiled after encountering heavy resistance. The North Vietnamese, too, left behind 83 dead.

Suddenly everyone was in motion. Abodeely thought of a race to the rescue. Marine official historian Jack Shulimson saw it as a three-ring circus. The Cav's 3rd Brigade and the 1st Marines kept up the pressure along Route 9. Its 1st Brigade joined the fight, opening LZ Snake southeast of the former Lang Vei Special Forces camp. The 2nd Brigade choppered its 2/12 Cavalry onto Hill 471 to relieve the Walking Dead. Those Marines moved on to Hill 552, which had been a North Vietnamese hotbed. The 2nd Battalion, 26th Marines broke out of its strongpoint on Hill 558 and went for Hill 700.

Tolson thought carefully about the mechanics of the relief and had decided he did not like the optics of cavalymen arriving first at Khe Sanh combat base. Instead he arranged for the ARVN 8th Airborne Battalion to air-assault into the sector of the base held by the ARVN 37th Ranger Battalion. The Old French Fort fell to 2/5 Cavalry on April 7. D Company of 2/7, with Abodeely's platoon, walked into Khe Sanh on Route 9 on April 8. The engineers completed the road connection on April 10.



Tolson had planned dozens of additional operations to clear the area around the combat base, but instead the Cav was immediately recalled for a thrust into the A Shau Valley. The division had suffered 41 or 59 dead (there are discrepancies), 207 or 251 wounded and five missing. Marines lost 51 killed and 459 wounded. Of the ARVN, 33 were killed in action and 187 wounded. The body count for the North Vietnamese stood at 1,304 with 24 men captured. Significant amounts of food, equipment and documents were captured as well. The Cavalry – and the Marines – had ridden to the rescue.

As we mark so many 50th anniversaries of the Vietnam conflict, the Battle of Khe Sanh is often mentioned, Operation Pegasus almost never. Let this serve to bring brave Marines and GIs back to mind once more. 🌿

*John Prados is a senior fellow of the National Security Archive and director of its Vietnam Documentation Project. His latest book is "The Ghosts of Langley: Into the CIA's Heart of Darkness." Visit his website at [johnprados.com](http://johnprados.com).*

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# 'We asked for no reward but a nation's thanks'

*Vietnam War Commemoration an opportunity to honor veterans and their families.*

**BY RETIRED MAJ. GEN. JAMES T. JACKSON**



*Staff Sgt. Harry Mitchell of C Troop, 1st Squad, 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment returns fire during a search-and-destroy mission in the "Iron Triangle."* National Archives

A year ago, President Trump signed the Vietnam War Veterans Recognition Act of 2017, establishing March 29 as National Vietnam War Veterans Day. This new recognition is just one part of a historic trend.

Across the nation, Americans are united in their desire to thank and honor Vietnam veterans and their families. VA estimates that we are losing as many as 382 Vietnam veterans a day, so we must act now. We have the opportunity to make a positive difference in the lives of every one of the 7 million living Vietnam and Vietnam-era veterans, and each of their families. Reaching out to them with a sincere "thank you for your service and sacrifice" is a strong start.

This initiative is the main focus of the United States of America Vietnam War Commemoration, a national 50th-anniversary remembrance authorized by Congress, established under the secretary of defense and launched by President Barack Obama in May 2012. This tremendous effort to show our thanks to Vietnam veterans and their families includes all U.S. veterans who served between Nov. 1, 1955, to May 15, 1975, and their families.

While we acknowledge the distinction between veterans who served in country, in theater and or were stationed elsewhere during this period, we honor all who served. They are known to us simply as "Vietnam veterans."

Key to the commemoration accomplishing its primary objective is its hometown-centric Commemorative Partner program. To date, more than 10,000 organizations at the local, state and federal levels have committed to conducting two events per year that recognize and honor Vietnam veterans and their families.

There are no costs associated with becoming a commemorative partner, and a mix of dedicated local and



national businesses, corporations, veterans and military organizations, associations, educational institutions, community groups, towns, cities, states and others have stepped up to assist the nation in this noble effort. To date, our partners have honored millions of veterans in their hometowns, conducting more than 11,600 events since the commemoration's inaugural event at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in 2012. The American Legion is one of our allies; in May 2016, the National Executive Committee passed Resolution 14, supporting the Vietnam War's half-century commemoration. We encourage local posts to join as well.

At these events, commemorative partners can present special Vietnam Veteran lapel pins to living U.S. veterans who served during the war period regardless of location, and/or certificates of honor to former POWs and family members of deceased and MIA veterans.

Now is the time for all Americans to fully embrace the brave men and women who returned home from Vietnam, often to shame and disgrace, by publicly thanking them, as well as recognizing the sacrifices of their families. As veterans, retired servicemembers and families of those who served, Legion Family members are encouraged to share this information with organizations they believe might be interested in becoming commemorative partners.

To quote retired Army Col. Albert Nahas, a Vietnam War veteran, "We had no expectations but to serve where duty called us. We asked for no reward except a nation's thanks."

Learn more about the Vietnam War commemoration online at **[www.vietnamwar50th.com](http://www.vietnamwar50th.com)**.

*Retired Army Maj. Gen. James T. Jackson is director of the United States of America Vietnam War Commemoration.*



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# THE COMPASSIONATE PRISON CAMP

*French historians reconstruct the time-faded story of Foucarville.*



**BY JEFF STOFFER**  
**PHOTOS COURTESY BENOIT LENOEL**

*Authors Anne Broilliard and Benoit Lenoel have revived a lost history.*

A remarkable monument to the Allied invasion of Normandy and the march to victory in the European campaign of World War II can be found alongside a narrow road tracing the perimeter of a grain field a few miles inland from Utah Beach, near the tiny village of Foucarville.

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two theaters. The camp was connected with 19 miles of high-voltage lines before many of the French villages had electricity at all after the invasion.

The prisoners, mainly German officers and teenagers, lived “under the symbol of liberty,” says Anne Broilliard, a local historian and co-author with Benoit Lenoel of the 2017 book “Prisonniers Allemands en Normandie,” available only in French, which revives the fading history of the U.S.-run enclosure, whose school sign read: “C.C.P.W.E. No. 19 University – Dedicated to the Re-Education of German Youth.” Foucarville was one of four such camps, and the largest, in France during World War II.





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U.S. Army chaplains and German pastors taught classes in such subjects as mathematics, literature and electronics inside the fence. U.S. military vehicles were repaired by detainees in two motor pools there. Toys and furniture were built in the workshops and distributed among area residents at Christmastime. Prisoners grew gardens to feed themselves. U.S. interrogators, including the so-called Ritchie Boys of Camp Ritchie, Md. – multilingual intelligence officers, quite often Jews who escaped Nazi Germany – probed the POWs for strategic information. Few attempted escape.

“I have collected testimonials from 20 different former prisoners,” Lenoel says. “They say they were treated better than anyone at any other camp. That is why the youngest and the generals were there.” The youngest POW, according to the authors, was 12. The camp also held 48 captured generals and one admiral.

After the liberation, the U.S. Army sent the prisoners back to Germany or assigned them to French enclosures to help rebuild the war-torn country, in an agreement struck between U.S. Supreme Allied Commander Gen. Dwight Eisenhower and French Gen. Charles de Gaulle. By 1947, some inmates became “free civil workers” so they could be housed and paid by French employers. France agreed to liberate all the German prisoners on Dec. 31, 1948, and to make citizenship available to workers who qualified.

“Some of the prisoners stayed,” Broilliard says. “Some married French girls. Some were from East Germany, so of course they preferred to stay. It was the beginning of new relations between Germany and France.”

Former prisoners and U.S. veterans who served at the Foucarville camp occasionally return to Normandy to remember their unique place in history. Broilliard and Lenoel continue collecting research on the camp and Col. Warren J. Kennedy of Hartford, Conn.

“The commander was a humanitarian,” Broilliard says. The authors have been communicating with Kennedy’s family members to learn what they can about a little-remembered piece of the Normandy story, now physically gone but not forgotten – a testament to the essential differences in prisoner treatment between the Allies and the Axis during World War II.

The camp’s story has been the subject of exhibits at the Utah Beach Landing Museum in Normandy and at the Airborne Museum in Ste. Mère-Église, the first town liberated by the Allies after the invasion. The book is available on Amazon. 🌿

*Jeff Stoffer is editor of The American Legion Magazine.*



*No more than a roadside monument remains of the POW town that sprang into existence in 1944.*



*A pot holder carved by a prisoner*



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California American Legion Department Commander Robert Heinisch chats with veterans at the January opening of "The Greatest Legislation," a traveling exhibit detailing the history of the GI Bill at Bob Hope Patriotic Hall in Los Angeles. Photos by Lucas Carter

## CENTENNIAL

# GI Bill's legacy, evolution honored in L.A.

World War II veteran William E. Price of American Legion Post 257 in Laguna Woods, Calif., stepped to the microphone to tell the story of how he went from newly discharged U.S. Army Air Corps electrical mechanic in 1946 to aerospace engineer whose work on the Voyager program still sends data back to Earth from intergalactic space.

Recent UCLA graduate and Student Veterans of America member Donnie Stiles, 36, explained how when he first enlisted in the Marine Corps, "I was not mature enough for college." That changed when he got out and realized the opportunity military service had given him.

American Legion Department of California Commander Robert Heinisch said education benefits were a driving force behind the decisions of his two sons to serve in the military.

Coast Guard Lt. Cmdr. Raymond Jackson, who commands Maritime Safety Security Team Los Angeles-Long Beach, described the GI Bill as "a tangible way to say thank you for your service."

They were among dozens who gathered Jan. 17 to share their experiences at Bob Hope Patriotic Hall, home of Los Angeles County Military & Veterans Services, for the opening of "The Greatest Legislation: An American Legion Centennial Salute to the GI Bill." The multimedia exhibit, at Patriotic Hall through March, is on its third stop in a national tour that began last June in New Orleans.



American Legion Past National Commander David K. Rehbein moderated a panel discussion after the opening that covered the evolution of veterans benefits from the dawn of The American Legion when, according to Dr. Jennifer Keene of Chapman University, a national World War I scholar, "they got \$60 in separation allowance. They could wear their uniform

home. They got train tickets. Veterans almost immediately turned to the new American Legion."

The Legion-drafted Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 – the "GI Bill of Rights" – revolutionized military service, U.S. economy and culture, and has continued to evolve through the decades. The latest benefits package, the Harry Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2017, known as the "Forever GI Bill," is named for the Legion past national commander credited as architect of the measure.

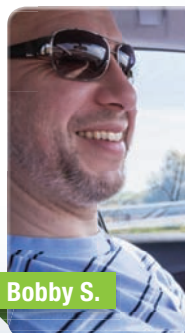
"The American Legion had the right idea," explained John Kamin, an Army veteran of the Iraq War and assistant director for the Legion's Employment & Education Division. College educations and low-interest home loans through the GI Bill "literally changed the face of the country."

"We cannot educate people enough on that," said opening attendee Hugh Crooks Jr., vice chairman of the California Veterans Board and former American Legion National Executive Committeeman.

– Jeff Stoffer

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National Commander Denise H. Rohan met with Department of Puerto Rico Commander Alfonso Christian on Jan. 15. Photo by Clay Lomneth

### NATIONAL EMERGENCY FUND

## Rohan to Puerto Rico: 'Your Legion Family cares'

Last September, Hurricane Maria devastated Puerto Rico, killing dozens and causing an estimated \$100 billion of damage on the already economically challenged island.

"Unfortunately, we were not able to drive semi-trucks loaded with supplies to Puerto Rico as we did for the people of Texas and Florida after hurricanes hit those states," National Commander Denise H. Rohan said while touring the American Legion Department of Puerto Rico in January. "But the people here are every bit as much a part of the American Legion Family. And families take care of each other in time of need."

Rohan's visit included Legion posts in Carolina, Arecibo, Camuy and Adjuntas. She visited staff, volunteers and patients at the VA community-based outpatient clinic in Ponce, then closed out the week visiting Legion Family members in St. Thomas and St. John – islands also hit hard during last fall's hurricane season.

"I want to know what you need so I can bring your stories to Congress," Rohan told Legionnaires and VA officials.

According to National Executive Committeeman Angel O. Narvaez, essential supplies were provided by FEMA and other organizations. "But people still need to rebuild, which is why it is so important for people to donate to the (Legion's) National Emergency Fund," he said.

Since Hurricane Maria hit, the NEF has awarded more than \$61,000 in grants to the department. In addition, \$15,500 in American Legion Temporary Financial Assistance (TFA) has been distributed to meet basic needs for children of Legion-eligible veterans, and the Legion's Operation Comfort Warriors program donated \$20,000 in gift cards to the region's VA patients during Rohan's visit.

Posts and departments have sent funds to Puerto Rico, too. Department donations include Pennsylvania (\$50,000), North Carolina (\$10,000) and New Jersey (\$1,000). Post donations include Florida's Post 57 (\$4,500), California's Hollywood Post 43 (\$2,200) and Alaska's Post 27 (\$2,000).

— John Raughter

Contribute to the NEF online: [legion.org/donate](https://legion.org/donate)

Watch a video: [legion.org/legiontv](https://legion.org/legiontv)

### HONOR & REMEMBRANCE

## World War I centennial coin now available

Sales are open for the 2018 World War I Centennial Silver Dollar, which honors the 100th anniversary of U.S. participation in World War I.

On Jan. 17, retired Army Col. Gerald York, grandson of famous World War I hero and Legionnaire Sgt. Alvin York, made a ceremonial "first purchase" of the coin at U.S. Mint Headquarters in Washington. He gifted the purchase to The American Legion in a presentation to Past National Commander Dan Dellinger.

The obverse design of the collectible silver dollar is titled "Soldier's Charge" and depicts an almost stone-like soldier gripping a rifle. Barbed wire twines are featured in the lower-right-hand side of the design. The wire design element continues onto the reverse side in a design titled "Poppies in the Wire," which features abstract poppies mixed in with barbed wire.

The coin's designer is Leroy Transfield of Orem, Utah, and the sculptor is Donald Eberhart. The Treasury secretary selected the winning coin design following an open design competition in 2016.

Surcharges from sales of the World War I coin are authorized to be paid to the U.S. Foundation for the Commemoration of the World Wars to assist the U.S. World War One Centennial Commission in marking the war's centenary. The commission was authorized by Congress to establish a national World War I memorial at Pershing Park in Washington.

The World War I silver dollar will be produced in limited quantities, and will be available for purchase online through Dec. 28. The Mint has also created special companion medals honoring each of the military branches that served in World War I. They are available from the Mint as part of five different World War I silver dollar and medal sets.

[catalog.usmint.gov](https://catalog.usmint.gov)

Past National Commander Dan Dellinger receives a coin from retired Col. Gerald York, center, and David Hamon, veterans liaison for the U.S. World War One Centennial Commission.

Photo courtesy U.S. World War I Centennial Commission



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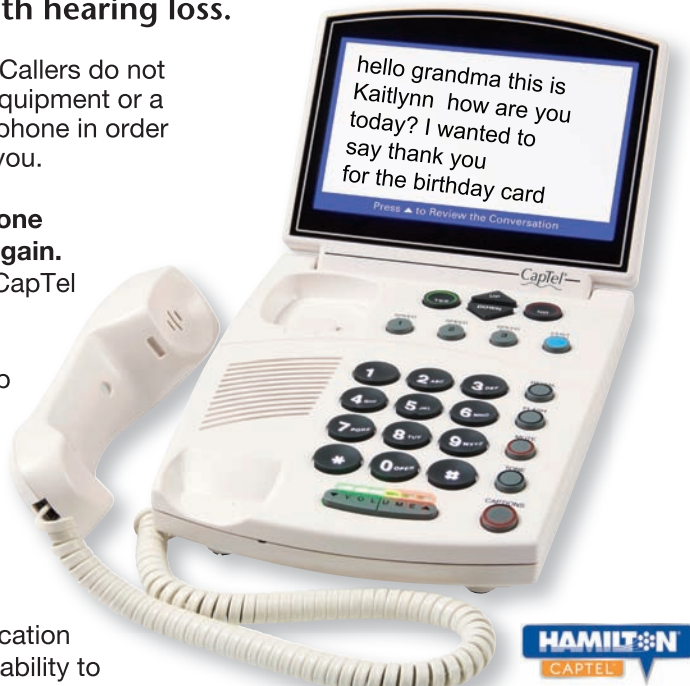
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## HONOR &amp; REMEMBRANCE

## Gold Star Families monuments multiply

On Dec. 2, the community of Hayward, Calif., dedicated a Gold Star Families Memorial Monument at Lone Tree Cemetery – the 29th nationwide and the first in California and on the West Coast. It was designed by, and is the vision of, Hershel Woodrow “Woody” Williams, 94, a life member of American Legion Post 177 in Barboursville, W.Va. A World War II Marine Corps veteran, he received the Medal of Honor for combat actions during the Battle of Iwo Jima.

Nearly 150 people attended the dedication, which was emceed by Michael Emerson, a Marine Corps veteran and American Legion life member. Emerson led the team that collected donations to build the monument.

Williams intends to establish at least one Gold Star monument in every state, through the Hershel “Woody” Williams Medal of Honor Foundation. The foundation works with local groups to get monuments developed and built, awards scholarships to eligible Gold Star children, and conducts outreach to increase public awareness of Gold Star families and the monuments.

As of January, 30 Gold Star monuments had been dedicated, and 50 more are in development, with footprints in 39 states. Visit [www.hwwwmohf.org](http://www.hwwwmohf.org) to see a map of monuments.

Photo by Lucas Carter



Photo courtesy Carl Beams Sr.

## CENTENNIAL

## Post 54, Freehold, N.J.

Freehold is the home of Freehold Raceway, the nation's oldest and fastest daytime half-mile harness racing track. (Horse races have taken place there since the 1830s.)

According to Carl Beams Sr., past commander of American Legion Post 54, the raceway often hosted an “American Legion Pace” in honor of local Legionnaires. Post officers attended and had their photographs taken in the winner's circle with the winning horse and driver. Pictured is a 1949 event, with Post 54 Commander Andy Paladino presenting a \$50 savings bond to Ed Kelly, driver for Fortunate Boy.

## SHARE YOUR POST'S LEGACY

Upload stories, photos and videos of your post's history on the Legion's Centennial Celebration website.

 [www.legion.org/centennial](http://www.legion.org/centennial)

## EDUCATION



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- A book and supply stipend.
- 36 months of benefits.

To apply for the scholarship, visit [www.vets.gov/education/gi-bill](http://www.vets.gov/education/gi-bill).

Valerie Heffner is a Marine Corps veteran and member of American Legion Post 27 in Apache Junction, Ariz.  
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## HONOR &amp; REMEMBRANCE

# Legionnaire reunites doughboy's dog tag with family

BY TOM GILBERT

In 1918, two U.S. soldiers met in war-ravaged France near the American hospital center at Vittel-Contrexéville, Department of the Vosges, in Lorraine. They were two strangers, young men cast together by the vagaries of modern conflict and the peculiarities of the American Expeditionary Forces. Although they came from similar backgrounds in that they were originally farm boys, Cpl. Royce Currie was a nascent mechanic from Alabama while Cpl. William Daggett hailed from Missouri near Kansas City.

After he returned from the war, Currie married and had two children. In 1920 he joined The American Legion and helped found a new post in Anniston. He died after a tragic motorcycle accident in 1934. Daggett returned to Missouri, married twice without children and died in 1953.

When Currie died, his wife locked away his trunk with all of his personal mementos, perhaps to hide the pain of his sudden loss so many years before. The trunk was passed on to her daughter, who passed it on to her son – me, Currie's grandson. As a retired Army lieutenant colonel and amateur military historian, I was anxious to unlock the trunk's secrets.

The trunk contained many World War I items. Most were obvious in their origin and purpose, but one stood out. In the bottom of the trunk was an unusual copper disk 33 millimeters in diameter. What was originally an 1859 French 10-centime coin of Napoleon III had been smoothed and engraved on one side. The engraving indicated that it was meant to be an ersatz dog tag, possibly to replace one lost in the Lorraine mud. It read, "W.H. Daggett, Corp., Co. F. 140 Inf., 1460834, U.S.A."



Cpl. Royce Currie, above, is believed to have fashioned a dog tag for his friend Cpl. William Daggett during their year in Europe. Photos courtesy Tom Gilbert



Also in the trunk were two silver French coins that had been evenly hammered on the edges to create rings. Currie apparently kept busy in his free time by making jewelry from French coins. He'd pound a small brass hammer on a coin's edge until it widened and the diameter was reduced to the size needed for the recipient's finger. When it would fit, he drilled out the center and smoothed the inside edges. As a mechanic, Currie knew how to work with metal and probably made the dog tag for Daggett.

I traced Daggett's home of record to Kansas City, Mo., and received his discharge information from the Missouri secretary of state's office. He served in the Missouri National Guard with F Company, 140th Infantry; he went overseas on April 25, 1918, and returned to the United States on April 28, 1919. Daggett departed France a couple of months prior to Currie. I believe my grandfather made the ersatz dog tag for Daggett while at Vittel-Contrexéville but was unable to give it to him before they parted. He felt some attachment and held on to the coin for the rest of his life.

Thanks to Ancestry.com, I was able to track down and contact three of Daggett's descendants in March. Of them, Meg Wiley – a great-niece living in Myrtle Beach, S.C. – agreed to be the custodian of Daggett's dog tag.

It is fitting that after 100 years this unique and personal artifact is now in the hands of Daggett's family. Perhaps a couple of ghosts from that faraway but not forgotten war can rest a little easier tonight.

*Tom Gilbert is a member of Oviedo Memorial American Legion Post 243 in Oviedo, Fla.*

## NATIONAL CONVENTION

## Band contest returns at Minneapolis

After a year's absence, the National Concert Band Contest is returning to the Legion's national convention.

This year, American Legion bands from across the country will face off at 1 p.m. Aug. 25 in the auditorium of the Minneapolis Convention Center.

After a tightly contested competition last year in Reno, Nev., Legion Family color guard units are gearing up for the National Color Guard Contest on Aug. 24. It starts at 5 p.m. in Hall B, Level 1, of the convention center, with the Newport Harbor Color Guard defending its championship title.

Go online for more information and contest applications:

 [www.legion.org/convention](http://www.legion.org/convention)

 [www.legion.org/convention/contests](http://www.legion.org/convention/contests)



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## TECHNOLOGY

## Millennial metrics

**73** Percent of American millennials (people ages 18 to 34) who prefer to communicate by text message rather than in person

**70** Percent who sleep within arm's length of their cellphones

**62** Percent who would rather forget their wallet than their phone

Source: LivePerson/StudyFinds



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## MEMORIAM

## PNC Kreul remembered for mentoring, listening

American Legion National Commander Denise H. Rohan has fond memories of Past National Commander Keith Kreul, who passed away Dec. 28 at 89 in Lancaster, Wis.

In particular, Rohan recalls Kreul's "humble and unassuming" nature. About the same time the Department of Wisconsin endorsed Rohan as a candidate for national commander, it was marking Kreul's 30th anniversary as national commander. A few weeks later, his post hosted an event for him that Rohan and her husband, Mike, attended.

"He made a big deal about me being there and (how) I would be Wisconsin's next national commander," Rohan said. "Immediately after my endorsement, the first letter of congratulations I received was from Keith Kreul. It was a nice note that said how proud he was of me."

Kreul, who served as national commander from 1983 to 1984, was an Army veteran and member of American Legion Post 184 in Fennimore. Kreul also served as department commander, national vice commander and chairman of the National Legislative Commission.

As national commander, Kreul made a point of praising Legionnaires doing the organization's work at the post level. "It is the blue-cap (Legionnaire) – with a dedication and zeal unmatched at the grassroots level – who has created and kept alive the dynamic programs for which we are known," he said. "It is you ... and your families who are the lifeblood of our great organization."

Kreul's year also included the 40th anniversary of the signing of the original GI Bill of Rights. He said the occasion was "a reminder to every Legionnaire that we are here to serve. The GI Bill provides a standard against which we can measure our efforts."

Rohan met Kreul approximately three years after his term as national commander, at her first department convention. During lunch, she was looking for a place to sit and noticed Kreul at a table by himself. "I'm guessing he was sitting by himself because everybody thought, 'You can't sit with the national commander,'" Rohan said. "I very sheepishly went over and asked if he minded if I sat with him ... He shared with me about going to the White House and meeting the president, testifying, traveling across the United States, the people he met. I'm getting to experience a lot of the same things he shared with me."

"He was always quiet and seemed to be listening. I never heard him say things like, 'I was national commander. We should do it this way.' He let people make decisions, but he would also help mentor."

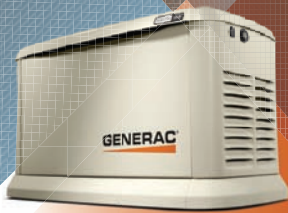
David Gough – who has served as Wisconsin department commander, National Executive Committeeman and national vice commander – said he met Kreul when he became active at the district level. "We became good friends, and he acted as a mentor to me," he said. "As I was running for state offices, Keith always supported me. I saw him just before I was sworn in as national vice (commander), and he was proud as punch."

Kreul is survived by his wife, Dolores, four children, nine grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren. Memorial contributions can be made to Fennimore American Legion Post 184, 960 Lincoln Ave., Fennimore, WI 53809, or to a charity of choice.

– Steve B. Brooks



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## THE GREAT WAR 100

**HONOR & REMEMBRANCE**

### 'Rumors are rife ... we might not be here very long'



**Editor's note:** Throughout the Great War's centennial, The American Legion Magazine will publish excerpts from the letters of D.B. "Bernard" Ryan of Albion, N.Y., who served as an Army infantry officer and helped found American Legion Sheret Post 35 in 1919.

#### HEADQUARTERS CO., 309TH INFANTRY, CAMP DIX, N.J. MARCH 13, 1918

Dear Mother

Riding class is a pleasant morning diversion and certainly makes one start the day right. The hour is just a little awkward, however, as I don't really have time for breakfast before going out and breakfast is finished when I come back. The result is that I eat something before and after the ride, being good for my never failing appetite. As our horses are as green or greener than we are, we are learning things for "both horse and man."

The problem of preparing an empty infirmary building for 100 ladies, guests for Friday's dance, was met in large measure today and the building is more than half way in readiness. I secured the cooperation of a Lt. who knew how and was willing and with 50 men of one of the provisional companies we rustled over from the storehouse 100 cots, 200 blankets, and 200 comforters and a number of small tables and shelter halves to use for curtains. I expect it will cause quite a commotion to have 100 women invade the camp and stay for a night or two.

#### MARCH 16, 1918

The dance was a great success according to everybody. There must have been 150 ladies and 250 officers present at the start, but of course some of the stags thinned out along towards midnight. Considering that on Wednesday nothing had been done about decorations and that four members of the committee were attending schools and had no time to give to them, the hall surely looked attractive.

Rumors are rife. Nothing official and I couldn't repeat it if there was. Better plan to come down here during the spring, as we might not be here very long. My asking for leave at Easter may depend on the duration of the Musketry course. Don't count on it.

#### MARCH 23, 1918

As I suggested before, I am tentatively sorting over my personal effects. Have my oil stove crated for shipment to you if you want it. Will throw out anything that is the least ragged – sox and underwear, for instance, and will eliminate everything possible. We have been told how much we can take overseas – 250 lbs – and I am going to try and get under that as no doubt there will be things to acquire over there. Troops will not wear any o.d. cotton so I suppose my half dozen suits will have to be left behind. There are two I have never worn, I think. Well, we will all know a lot more one month from now than we do at present.

Love, DBR



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## PERSONAL FINANCE



## This year, trade lucky for good

### FOCUS ON FINANCES



J.J. MONTANARO

While it's good to be lucky, you don't need to be lucky to be good. That's especially true when it comes to managing your money and charting your course to financial freedom. It's highly unlikely, but financial security could come in the form of a lotto win, an unexpected inheritance or stumbling upon a

priceless heirloom at your neighborhood garage sale. Don't pin your hopes on something like that happening.

Instead, create your own luck. Here are four ways to do it, and you won't need a lucky clover or a leprechaun to make them work for you.

■ **Move money to the top of your agenda.** In other words, have regular and purposeful money conversations. Take a moment and think about the money talks you and your significant other have had over the past few months. If you're like most people, you might have discussed a purchase, argued about spending or, if things are going pretty good, just motored on without the topic ever surfacing. Everyone's rhythm is different, but make a point to discuss and agree upon your important financial goals (retirement, kids' college, new house) and your specific plan to do what it takes to make them a reality.

■ **Command your day-to-day finances.** Luck should have nothing to do with who's in charge of your finances. Do you control your money, or does it control you? Where does it go? Are you directing funds to the goals you've agreed on? Have you got your planned expenses nailed down to the last penny with robust savings in place, or do you survive

each pay period and – if with some luck anything is left over – save a little? A tightly adhered-to budget that incorporates the notion of “pay yourself first” is a key element of making your own luck.

■ **Construct a solid wall against the unexpected.** When was the last time you updated your legal documents? Checked your beneficiaries? Reviewed all your insurance coverages to ensure they still make sense in the context of your current situation? Do you have a solid emergency fund in place? These are all building blocks to shield you from financial mishap or ruin. Being good and putting the right plans into place won't let some bad luck derail your finances.

■ **Seize time as your ally.** I'm blessed to spend a lot of my time speaking with servicemembers and their spouses who are just starting their financial lives. I never miss an opportunity to trumpet the power of time. Believe it or not, I broke out my financial calculator over the holidays to show my own kids how \$100 per month could turn into hundreds of thousands. That's the power of time and compounding returns. No matter where you are, today is a much better time to save or save more than five or 10 years from now – and everything you're able to save and invest today can make a difference down the road.

It's time to stop hoping for something good to happen and make it happen.

*J.J. Montanaro is a certified financial planner with USAA, The American Legion's preferred provider of financial services. Submit questions for him online.*

[www.legion.org/usaa/focusonfinances](http://www.legion.org/usaa/focusonfinances)

### MEMBERSHIP

## Posts with the most

As of July 31, **Veterans Memorial American Legion Post 347** in Lady Lake, Fla., was the largest post with **6,221** members. The second-largest post in the nation also was from Florida, **Augustus Ruser Jr. Post 273** in Madeira Beach, with a membership of **4,144**. Third largest was **Newport Harbor Post 291** in Newport Harbor, Calif., with **3,822** members, followed by **Apache Post 27** in Apache Junction, Ariz., with **2,574**, **Oak Orchard/Riverdale Post 28** in Millsboro, Del., with **2,541**, and **Cyber, Inc., Post 208** in Orlando, Fla., with **2,270**.

### VERBATIM

**I didn't know what to do. We all stared at each other. It kind of shows you the world we live in now. Your whole life can change in a second.**

**Charles Howell III**, a pro golfer who was in Honolulu for the 2018 Sony Open on Jan. 13, when an emergency alert was sent to phones throughout Hawaii stating there was an inbound ballistic missile. It was a false alarm, sent when an employee pushed the wrong button. The errant message was corrected 38 minutes later. Source: AP



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## PERSONAL FINANCE

## Top-rated states for military retirees

The personal finance website WalletHub recently released findings from a study comparing the 50 states and the District of Columbia for military-retiree quality of life. The company's analysts reviewed such factors as job opportunities and access to VA health care.

1. Alaska
2. South Dakota
3. Montana
4. Wyoming
5. Florida
6. Maine
7. New Hampshire
8. North Dakota
9. Hawaii
10. South Carolina

Also among the findings:

- Alaska has the **highest percentage of veterans** at 10.1 percent.
- Virginia has the **lowest percentage of homeless veterans** compared to the overall veteran population.
- New York has the **highest number of VA health-care facilities** per number of veterans.
- Alaska has the **highest number of Veterans Benefits Administration offices** per number of veterans.
- South Carolina has the **highest percentage of veteran-owned businesses with paid employees**.

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## How to submit a reunion

The American Legion Magazine publishes reunion notices for veterans. Send notices to **The American Legion Magazine, Attn: Reunions, P.O. Box 1055, Indianapolis, IN 46206**, fax (317) 630-1280, e-mail [reunions@legion.org](mailto:reunions@legion.org) or submit information via our website, [www.legion.org/reunions](http://www.legion.org/reunions).

Include the branch of service and complete name of the group, no abbreviations, with your request. The listing also should include the reunion dates and city, along with a contact name, telephone number and e-mail address. Listings are publicized free of charge.

Your notice will appear on our Web site within a week and will remain available online until the final day of your reunion. Upon submission, please allow three months for your reunion to be published in print. **Due to the large number of reunions, The American Legion Magazine will publish a group's listing only once a year.**

Notices should be sent at least six months prior to the reunion to ensure timely publication.

## Other notices

"In Search Of" is a means of getting in touch with people from your unit to plan a reunion. **We do not publish listings that seek people for interviews, research purposes, military photos or help in filing a VA claim.** Listings must include the name of the unit from which you seek people, the time period and the location, as well as a contact name, telephone number and e-mail address. Send notices to **The American Legion Magazine, Attn: "In Search Of," P.O. Box 1055, Indianapolis, IN 46206**, fax (317) 630-1280 or e-mail [reunions@legion.org](mailto:reunions@legion.org).

The magazine will not publish names of individuals, only the name of the unit. Listings are published free of charge.

Life Membership notices are published for Legionnaires who have been awarded life

memberships by their posts. **This does not include a member's own Paid-Up-For-Life membership.** Notices must be submitted on official forms, which may be obtained by sending a self-addressed stamped envelope to **The American Legion Magazine, Attn: Life Memberships, P.O. Box 1055, Indianapolis, IN 46206.**

"Comrades in Distress" listings must be approved by the Legion's Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation division. If you are seeking to verify an injury received during service, contact your Legion department service officer for information on how to publish a notice.

To respond to a "Comrades in Distress" listing, send a letter to **The American Legion Magazine, Attn: Comrades in Distress, P.O. Box 1055, Indianapolis, IN 46206.** Include the listing's CID number in your response.

"Taps" notices are published only for Legionnaires who served as department commanders or national officers.

## AIR FORCE / ARMY AIR FORCES

**22nd Sqdn (Tachikawa AB, Japan) & 22nd Mil Airlift Sqdn (C-124 Globemaster), Branson, MO,** 6/12-14, Henry Trujillo, (719) 545-4156, [alute@comcast.net](mailto:alute@comcast.net); **57th Alumni Assn - 57th TCS, 57th MAS, 57th AS & 57th WPS (Assigned or Attached), Branson, MO,** 9/27-30, Woodie Hall, (239) 850-1758, [president@57thlumni.com](mailto:president@57thlumni.com); **87th Ftr Interceptor Sqdn, Gwinn, MI,** 8/4-5, Clyde Sinclair, (616) 822-9627, [csinclair@usa.com](mailto:csinclair@usa.com); **601st Sec Police Sqdn (Sembach AB, Germany, Jan 1965-Dec 1969), Branson, MO,** 6/11-14, Jim Bely, (313) 388-1711, [belyjames1947@gmail.com](mailto:belyjames1947@gmail.com); **5074th AB Sqdn / 1935th Comm Sqdn, Colorado Springs, CO,** 6/21-23, Jim Fetrow, (616) 443-1946, [fetrowj590@gmail.com](mailto:fetrowj590@gmail.com); **AF Public Affairs Alumni Assn 25th Annual Mbrshp Meeting (Retired, Active Military and Civilians from Public Affairs, Broadcasting, Band & Media), San Diego,** 5/31-6/2, John Terino, (703) 239-2704, [johnterino@afpaaa.org](mailto:johnterino@afpaaa.org); **C-123 Crews & Support (SE Asia), San Antonio,** 4/16-20, Sue Rice, (417) 872-9750, [ricepad13@gmail.com](mailto:ricepad13@gmail.com); **Martin B-26 Marauder, Colorado Springs, CO,** 8/1-4, Jenn Merritt, (520) 322-6226, [admin@b-26mhs.org](mailto:admin@b-26mhs.org)

## ARMY

**1/12th Inf "Red Warriors," Brookfield, WI,** 9/4-6, Herb Taylor, (913) 302-1751, [jan@gmail.com](mailto:jan@gmail.com); **1st Mil Intel Bn (ARS) (Vietnam), San Antonio,** 5/17-19, Don Skinner, (503) 648-6059, [donsk@frontier.com](mailto:donsk@frontier.com); **4th Inf "Ivy" Div (All Eras), Green Bay, WI,** 8/1-4, Glen "Rusty" Armstrong, (414) 630-2484, [www.4thinfantry.org](http://www.4thinfantry.org); **4th RTC, Cedar Rapids, IA,** 9/10-14, Alex MacFarlane, (847) 543-0926; **24th Cbt Eng 4th Armd Div (Fuerth, Germany, 1960-1964), Nashville, TN,** 6/11-15, Ralph Mullens, (678) 475-7058, [panther046@bellsouth.net](mailto:panther046@bellsouth.net); **25th Inf Div, Providence, RI,** 10/8-13, Sarah Krause, (215) 880-0181, [tropicltn@aol.com](mailto:tropicltn@aol.com); **30th FA Rgt (All Yrs), Fort Sill/Lawton, OK,** 6/12-16, Dan Mitchell, (405) 618-6441, [countyhonorguard@yahoo.com](mailto:countyhonorguard@yahoo.com); **124th Trans Cmd, Pigeon Forge, TN,** 5/1-6, Wesley Taylor, (904) 335-7402, [vietnam566th@yahoo.com](mailto:vietnam566th@yahoo.com); **284th Avn Unit (ATC)/USACC/Republic of Korea, Las Vegas,** 5/27-28, William Grubb, (503) 512-7543, [will.grubb@gmail.com](mailto:will.grubb@gmail.com); **538th Trans Co (Vietnam) - Petro-Main & Orient Express, Louisville, KY,** 6/1-3, Larry "Peanuts" Parker, (410) 459-6931, [purpleheartpark@msn.com](mailto:purpleheartpark@msn.com); **720th MP, Arlington, VA,** 5/25-28, Jim Ahlfeld; **D Co 1st Bn 6th Inf 198th LIB Americal Div (Vietnam), Kansas City, MO,** 9/13-17, Lynn Baker, (870) 253-1591, [ldbhistory@yahoo.com](mailto:ldbhistory@yahoo.com); **ABU Co 1-327th Inf 101st Abn Div, Fort Campbell, KY,** 5/23, Billy Robbins, (252) 382-2300, [abuonezero@gmail.com](mailto:abuonezero@gmail.com); **D Trp (Air), 1/10 Cav, 4th Inf Div (Vietnam Era), Reno, NV,** 5/1-4, Ron Adams, (404) 713-0709, [adamsofga@aol.com](mailto:adamsofga@aol.com); **Delta Trp Blackhawks, 7/1 Air Cav (Vietnam), Fort Knox, KY,** 5/17-19, Joe Vernengo, (586) 337-3334, [jvern@comcast.net](mailto:jvern@comcast.net);

**Hamburger Hill Chpt of Rakkasans, Clarksville, TN,** 5/14-18, Thomas Martin, (856) 332-7030, [tomsml96@yahoo.com](mailto:tomsml96@yahoo.com)

## COAST GUARD

**NW Coast Guard Reunion, Coeur d'Alene, ID,** 9/14-16, Darlene Amundson, (208) 292-4840, [amundson1693@frontier.com](mailto:amundson1693@frontier.com)

## JOINT

**Alaska Mil Vets, Cedar Rapids, IA,** 9/10-14, Don Retchlag, (847) 229-9717

## MARINES

**Fox 2/7 & H 2/1 (July 1965-Feb 1966), Colorado Springs, CO,** 7/15-20, Ron Gryn, (352) 638-2872, [boatmanron@gmail.com](mailto:boatmanron@gmail.com); **Mar Brks Bermuda, Colorado Springs, CO,** 9/23-27, Dennis McDonald, (763) 473-3458, [d.mcdonald82575@comcast.net](mailto:d.mcdonald82575@comcast.net); **Mar Brks NSA Fort Meade, MD,** Parris Island, SC, 4/12-15, Bob Pepin, (508) 831-5575, [rpepin@wpi.edu](mailto:rpepin@wpi.edu); **VMFA-232 (Vietnam & Nam Phong, Thailand), Colorado Springs, CO,** 10/4-7, Gus Fitch, (803) 649-6466, [pncfzn@gmail.com](mailto:pncfzn@gmail.com)

## NAVY

**Ajax AR 6, Wilmington, NC,** 6/10-14, Kathy Dewey, (619) 218-0700, [kdewey@kdlaw.com](mailto:kdewey@kdlaw.com); **Ashtabula AO 51, Ames, IA,** 6/20-23, John Kosti, (515) 212-0741, [majicjk40@yahoo.com](mailto:majicjk40@yahoo.com); **Beale DD/ DDE 471, Cocoa Beach, FL,** 10/12-15, Paul Barry, (321) 327-3367, [ussbealeinc@gmail.com](mailto:ussbealeinc@gmail.com); **Boston CA 69/CG 1/SSN 703, Warwick, RI,** 7/19-22, Barry Probst, (508) 580-3808; **Colonial LSD 18, San Diego,** 9/12-16, Ron Patteson, (509) 929-6013, [rpntheburg@hotmail.com](mailto:rpntheburg@hotmail.com); **Concord AFS 5, Charleston, SC,** 9/12-16, Sherry Mills, (719) 380-1412, [sherry.acompletoreunion@gmail.com](mailto:sherry.acompletoreunion@gmail.com); **Dennis J. Buckley DD/DDR 808, Bremerton, WA,** 9/9-12, Ken Stone, (740) 965-1886, [kjstone34@aol.com](mailto:kjstone34@aol.com); **Destroyer Leader Assn - DL 1, DL 2/ DDG 35, DL 3/DDG 36, DL 4, DL 5, Virginia Beach, VA,** 10/28-11/4, Mike Bugara, (401) 635-8860, [mjbugara@hotmail.com](mailto:mjbugara@hotmail.com); **Dubuque LPD 8, Evansville, IN,** 6/29-30, Sonny Paker, (812) 228-7260, [ussdbq8reunion@yahoo.com](mailto:ussdbq8reunion@yahoo.com); **Eldorado AGC 11, Philadelphia,** 9/25-29, Stanley Davis, (410) 903-6494, [sdavis20034@msn.com](mailto:sdavis20034@msn.com); **Frank Knox DD/DDR 742, Buffalo, NY,** 9/19-23, Vaughan Kruger, (206) 466-6094, [vaughankruger@yahoo.com](mailto:vaughankruger@yahoo.com); **Gregory DD 802, Monterey, CA,** 4/22-26, Ken Boyer, (651) 633-6247, [gloriab13@usfamily.net](mailto:gloriab13@usfamily.net); **Hancock CV/CVA 19, Kansas City, MO,** 5/23-28, Larry McCoy, (816) 213-3172, [larry\\_mccoy@msn.com](mailto:larry_mccoy@msn.com); **Hunley AS 31, Pensacola, FL,** 6/17-21, James Flowers, (850) 686-9237, [hunleyreunion@gmail.com](mailto:hunleyreunion@gmail.com); **John S. McCain DL 3/DDG 36, Virginia Beach, VA,** 10/28-11/4, Peter Peterson, (321) 952-2066, [retp401@gmail.com](mailto:retp401@gmail.com); **John W. Thomason, San Antonio,** 9/25-29, Howard Barrett, (574)

849-0271, [barretthoward45@yahoo.com](mailto:barretthoward45@yahoo.com); **Joseph Strauss DDG 16, Annapolis, MD,** 10/24-28, Bob Wilson, (540) 419-1857, [wilson\\_bob@bectech.com](mailto:wilson_bob@bectech.com); **Mansfield DD 728, Southaven, MS,** 8/22-26, Sherrie Werts, (870) 565-0520, [childofmineabc@yahoo.com](mailto:childofmineabc@yahoo.com); **Mitscher DL 2/DDG 35, Virginia Beach, VA,** 10/28-11/4, Gary Marchido, (231) 206-1665, [garmarchido@aol.com](mailto:garmarchido@aol.com); **NAS Sanford (All Units & Sqdns, 1942-1968), Sanford, FL,** 6/21-24, Ralph Feeback, (407) 302-2252, [dflrft@aol.com](mailto:dflrft@aol.com); **Norfolk DL 1, Virginia Beach, VA,** 10/28-11/4, Bob Godas, (516) 293-4115, [robertgodas190@gmail.com](mailto:robertgodas190@gmail.com); **Pocono AGC/ICC 16, New Orleans,** 9/16-19, Jim DeVold, (803) 781-9887, [jbdevold@aol.com](mailto:jbdevold@aol.com); **Raton SS/SSR/AGSS 270, Bremerton, WA,** 9/19-23, Larry Kramer, (360) 697-2842, [ldkramer43@hotmail.com](mailto:ldkramer43@hotmail.com); **Regulus AF 57, Mount Pleasant, SC,** 5/15-18, Richard Neiman, (804) 337-2626, [ricneim@aol.com](mailto:ricneim@aol.com); **Sam Houston SSBN/SSN 609, Long Beach, CA,** 9/6-8, Howard Dobson, (302) 764-1197, [howardvaldobson@verizon.net](mailto:howardvaldobson@verizon.net); **Seaplane Sailors, Pensacola, FL,** 5/2-6, Robert Tibbetts, (859) 223-7871, [bobt42@twc.com](mailto:bobt42@twc.com); **Ticonderoga CVA 14/CG 47, New Orleans,** 5/11-21, Steve Coddington, (309) 827-4017, [sandycodd@aol.com](mailto:sandycodd@aol.com); **Toledo CA 133, Branson, MO,** 9/9-13, Paul Specht, (405) 737-7404, [ichisansan@cox.net](mailto:ichisansan@cox.net); **VA-115 Arabs, San Diego,** 2/15-19, Howard Triggs, (763) 389-5705, [hjtriggs@gmail.com](mailto:hjtriggs@gmail.com); **Wilkinson DL 5, Virginia Beach, VA,** 10/28-11/4, John Lair, (619) 479-7387, [hobocamp@aol.com](mailto:hobocamp@aol.com); **Willis A. Lee DL 4, Virginia Beach, VA,** 10/28-11/4, Frank Graham, (718) 934-6410, [frankld4@optonline.net](mailto:frankld4@optonline.net)

## LIFE MEMBERSHIP

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**Fort Riley, KS, 1971 Soccer Team, 5th Army Soccer Tournament (Fort Bliss, TX, Nov 1971)**, R. Bravo, (619) 948-4455, rbravob2@yahoo.com

**HQB 6th/67th ADA (Fort Riley, KS, 1970-1972)**, R. Bravo, (619) 948-4455, rbravob2@yahoo.com

**HQ & HQ Btry 1/14 Arty Commo (Chi Lia & Ly Tin, Vietnam, Aug 1970-Aug 1971)**, Keith Bergeron, (218) 526-0229, kbbergeron@gmail.com

**HQ & HQ Co 11th Cbt Avn Bn Security/Infantry Plt (Phu Loi, 1966)**, Danny Havellana, (918) 232-5940, cindy.havellana@icloud.com

**Judge Advocate General (JAG) Office, Williams AFB, Mesa/Chandler, AZ (1950-1954)**, Alec Pandaleon, (845) 266-9800, aap3rd@hotmail.com

## TAPS

**Dalton J. Comeaux, Dept. of Louisiana.** Dept.

Cmdr. 1968-1969, Nat'l Cmsn. on Children & Youth Mbr. 1962-1965, Nat'l Distinguished Guests Cmte. Memb. 1952-1953, Nat'l Foreign Relations Cncl. Vice Chmn. 1969-1970, Nat'l Mbrshp. & Post Activ. Cmte. Memb. 1954-1955, Nat'l Sec. Cncl. Vice Chmn. 1997-2006 and Nat'l Agriculture & Conserv. Cmte. Memb. 1960-1961.

**Teddy L. Duckworth, Dept. of Wisconsin.** Dept. Cmdr. 2005-2006 and Nat'l Veterans Affairs & Rehab. Cmsn. Memb. 1993-2017.

**Keith A. Kreul, Dept. of Wisconsin.** Nat'l Cmdr. 1983-1984, Nat'l Vice Cmdr. 1979-1980, Dept. Cmdr. 1973-1974, Nat'l Advisory Cmte. to Nat'l Cmdr. Chmn. 1984-1985, Nat'l Advisory Cmte. to Nat'l Cmdr. Vice Chmn. 1985-1986, Nat'l Veterans Employment & Education Cmsn. 1976-1977, Nat'l Exec. Cmte. Memb. 1974-1976, Nat'l Overseas Graves Decoration Trust Vice Chmn. 1984-1985, Nat'l Overseas Graves Decoration Trust Chmn. 1983-1984, Nat'l Overseas Graves

Decoration Trust Memb. 1985-1986, Nat'l Legis. Cmsn. Chmn. 1980-1981, Nat'l Legis. Cmsn. Cons. 1981-1982, Nat'l American Legion Magazine Cmsn. Memb. 1977-1979, Nat'l Public Relations Cmsn. Cons. 1972-1973, Nat'l Public Relations Cmsn. Nat'l Cmdr.'s Rep. 1982-1983, Nat'l Public Relations Cmsn. Liaison Cmte. Memb. 1974-1976, Nat'l Veteran Planning & Coord. Cmte. Chmn. 1983-1984 and Nat'l Select Cmte. on Special Problems of VA&R Vice Chmn. 1980-1981.

**Benedict A. Lee, Dept. of North Carolina.** Dept. Cmdr. 2011-2012, Nat'l Counter-Subversive Activ. Cmte. Memb. 2004-2006, Nat'l Counter-Subversive Activ. Cmte. Vice Chmn. 2006-2011, Nat'l Citizens Flag Alliance Advisory Cmte. 2013-2015, Nat'l Foreign Relations Cncl. Vice Chmn. 2003-2004, Nat'l Media & Comm. Cncl. Memb. 2015-2016, Nat'l Media & Comm. Cmsn. Chmn. 2013-2015, Nat'l Sec. Cncl. 2016-2018, Nat'l Public Relations Cmsn. Memb. 2011-2013, Nat'l Employment Cmte. Cons. 1992-1999, Nat'l Citizens Flag Alliance Dept. Chmn. 1994-1996 and Nat'l Sec. Cncl. Vice Chmn. 1976-1985.

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One day, a scrawny man came into the bar and said, in a tiny voice, "I'd like to try the bet." After the laughter died down, the bartender grabbed a lemon and squeezed away. Then he handed the rind's wrinkled remains to the small man.

The crowd's laughter turned to total silence as the small man clenched his fist around the lemon and six drops fell into the glass. As they started to cheer, the bartender gave him the \$1,000 and said, "Incredible! What do you do for a living?"

The man replied, "IRS agent."

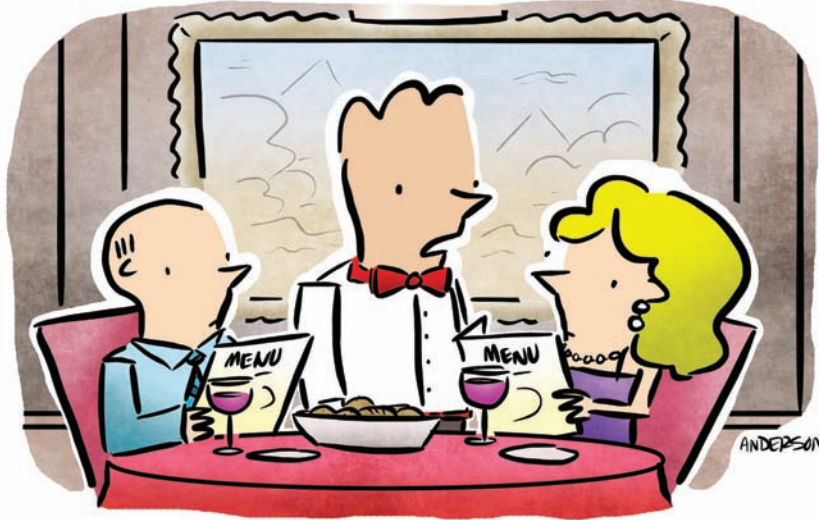
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**HOW MANY** animals' backs did we jump on before we figured out that horses are OK with it?

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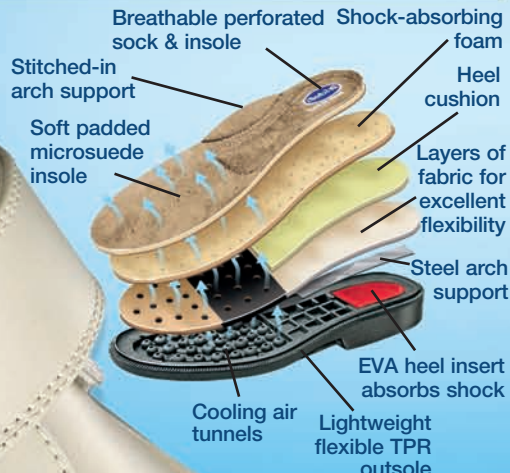
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